WHAT MAKES FEEDBACK ACTIONABLE?

AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY OF

THE INFLUENCE PRINCIPALS

HAVE ON TEACHERS

by

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STATEMENT OF DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

Using an embedded, single-case study design, the current study examined factors that make a teacher more likely to act upon feedback given about instruction. Specifically, the study explored the nature of the feedback process used to provide teachers with feedback about instruction, a principal's ability to connect a vision for improvement with feedback for improvement, and the influence a principal has in improving instruction through feedback. Data were gathered from 11 teachers and one principal from the same school through questionnaires, focus groups, individual interviews, and document analysis.

Findings demonstrated that teachers prefer written feedback that is paired with observation data. Further, teachers are more likely to act upon feedback when the feedback is specific, doable, and has a balance of positive to corrective feedback that is tailored to their individual needs. This study also revealed how a principal closed the knowing-doing gap in her instructional leadership by developing her own instructional expertise and by implementing a plan for systematically monitoring teachers' instructional growth. A major contribution of the study was the conditions that emerged that made feedback actionable. Key conditions included investing in relationships, reciprocity of accountability and capacity, and coordinating layers of support for teachers and principals. These findings bring to light that relational trust and accountability are not mutually exclusive and that effective school leaders prioritize both for school improvement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Each year principals across the country are tasked with assigning students to teachers' classrooms. For many principals, this task turns into a moral dilemma because teacher effectiveness rates vary dramatically and teachers have significant impact on the lives of students. Ultimately, principals must choose which students will be placed in less effective teachers' classrooms, fating those students to potentially lower quality instruction and fewer opportunities for achievement. The variance in teacher quality contributes directly to the variance in student achievement (Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). So much so that having a top-quartile teacher versus a bottom-quartile teacher four years in a row could be enough to close the achievement gap between white and black students (Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006). The magnitude of teacher effects are summarized by Gordon and colleagues (2006):

> Over the last two decades, policymakers have fretted over the quality of elementary and secondary education in the United States. Worried that the public education system has become a constraint on future productivity growth and a root cause of income inequality, leaders have championed a succession of reforms—from test-based accountability to smaller class sizes. But, ultimately, the success of U.S. public education depends upon the skills of the 3.1 million teachers managing classrooms in elementary and secondary schools around the country. Everything else—educational standards, testing, class size, greater accountability—is background, intended to support the crucial interactions between teachers and their students. Without the right people standing in front of the classroom, school reform is a futile exercise. (p. 5)

In order to reduce the number of instructional casualties, principals and the educational community must act to improve teacher quality.

Improving teacher quality, in many cases, will require teachers to replace current instructional practices with more effective practices. In a report written for McKinsey and Company entitled "How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better," the authors examined 20 school systems from across the globe who have shown sustained improvement for 6 to 25 years. One of the key factors in sustaining improvement efforts in all 20 of these education systems was to changing the way teachers think about their work. This was accomplished by establishing collaborative, professional learning practices and making classroom instruction public in order to deepen the instructional skills of the teachers (Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010).

Influencing the way teachers think about teaching is often the responsibility of the building principal. Effective principals invest their time in developing educators' instructional skills in order to impact student achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009). Leading teacher learning is a focus of most reform initiatives. While much work has been done comparing traditional professional development models, such as workshops and conferences, with reform models of professional development, including job-embedded and collaborative structures, what remains underexplored is the explicit role that feedback plays in shaping teacher learning. Feedback is among the most powerful learning strategies for acquiring and applying new skills (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) and while feedback is an implied part of professional development, minimal research has been conducted on feedback as a learning construct for improving teaching. The research is especially sparse in

examining the feedback that principals provide to teachers about instructional practices.

If teacher quality is one of the most important variables that impacts student achievement (Rockoff, 2004) and principals have the most direct impact on teachers' learning (Robinison, 2011), and learning is increased by high rates of feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007), then it is imperative that we learn more about how principals provide feedback to teachers about instruction.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of the feedback process a principal used with teachers to improve instruction, a principal's ability to connect a vision for improvement with feedback for improvement, and the influence a principal had in improving instruction through feedback. This study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What type of feedback does a principal provide to teachers about instructional practice?
2. What processes does a principal use to provide instructional feedback to teachers?
3. How is the feedback process for improving teachers' practices related to a principal's ability to set clear improvement goals?
4. In what ways are teacher practices influenced by the feedback for improving instruction provided by a principal?

Presently, these questions are important because the concept of using feedback to influence teacher practice has not been broadly researched and reported. This study merges the body of research on feedback to increase student learning with that of implicit

references of feedback within the professional learning research in order to more closely examine feedback as it relates to improving instruction. Guided by the research questions, the study aims to understand how a principal provides feedback and how giving feedback contributes to a principal's efforts to lead a school towards improved student outcomes.

Research Strategy Overview

In order to capture the complexity of how feedback is used to influence teachers, a single-case study design was employed. Case study research allows for the study of particularity within an authentic context to better understand a phenomenon or problem (Stake, 1995). The context for this case study was an elementary school. The design included an embedded approach that focused on the principal as the case and 11 teachers as an embedded subunit of analysis. Focus groups and individual interviews were used as the primary data sources and questionnaires and a comprehensive document analysis were used as secondary sources.

Research Context

The site selected for this study has some unique features that may not be present in many schools or districts. The target school is located in a school district that was established in 2009 as the first newly formed district in the state in over 100 years. The new district was established after residents in five neighboring cities voted to create a district that would focus on innovative practices and community engagement to better prepare students for college and careers. The newly elected Board of Education hired a

superintendent with a nontraditional background, having experience in higher education and educational law. This innovative superintendent hired senior staff members from various organizations and with diversified skill sets to carry out an aggressive reform agenda. I was among the senior staff hired in 2009.

Establishing the newly formed school district included the division of assets, personnel, and acquired debt from the previous school district. All school-based educators and support staff who were working in schools that resided within the new school district's boundary were assigned as employees of the new school district. These employees were involuntarily separated from a district in which they initially chose for employment and were required to learn and implement the new ideas, values, and philosophies for educating students held by the new district. The new school district agreed to implement all of the original school district's policies for the first year in operation. However, the senior staff almost immediately developed updated procedures and required teaching and leadership practices that were different from what employees were used to implementing. Roles of district administrators and district office staff were also organized differently and required employees to learn new chains of command, decision-making protocols, and ways to access support.

Information pertaining to the formation of this school district is important to this study because the employees who participated have been involved in many changes, including requirements to implement new instructional practices, content standards, curriculum programs, and assessments that are standardized across the school district. Furthermore, structures of collaboration, professional development and coaching, and leadership (teacher and principal) at the building level have changed to reflect a system

that is aligned to a district-wide instructional framework that guides the work of all educators. In essence, everything about elementary education in this district has changed and employees have been in a perpetual change cycle for the last 5 years.

Significance of Study

For more than 30 years, the education profession has searched for solutions to improve our country's education system in order to benefit more students. The evidence points to what might be considered a common-sense idea—improving instruction, or teacher quality, improves student outcomes (see Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Wright et al., 1997). Yet improving teacher quality has been a daunting task for building principals, district administrators, and local policymakers. As research about leadership, professional development, and student learning continue to emerge and inform reform activities, a careful analysis of how these bodies of research fit together to inform how instruction can be improved is needed. Using feedback for learning as a construct, this study integrated the research in the aforementioned areas to better understand how teachers use feedback, specifically feedback teachers receive from principals to improve instruction. Discoveries from this study inform researchers in developing theories around feedback for learning to improve instruction and expand the dimensions of what we know about the impact principals have on student achievement through the development of effective instruction (Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson et al., 2009). Additionally, this study extends the research on feedback for learning from students to adults (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Using Feedback to Improve Teacher Effectiveness

Teacher quality is one of the most important variables that impacts student achievement outcomes (Rockoff, 2004). The variance in teacher quality contributes directly to the variance in student achievement (Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997) suggesting that teachers make a difference in the lives of students. Unfortunately, not all teachers have a positive impact on student learning and the magnitude of teacher impact is significant (Aaronson, Barrow, & Sander, 2007). Sanders and Rivers (1996) directly studied the influence of teacher effectiveness on student learning and found that students assigned to three highly effective teachers in a row earned scores as much as 50 percentile points higher on standardized tests than students who were assigned to three ineffective teachers in a row. They also found that highly effective teachers improved learning growth for all students, including those with learning challenges. In the same vein, Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain (2005) reviewed longitudinal data of more than one-half million students and found that quality instruction could offset the disadvantages associated with poverty, thereby closing the achievement gap. Some argue that the discrepancy in teacher effectiveness begins in teacher preparation programs (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009; Goldhaber, Liddle, & Theobald, 2012).

These findings suggest that teaching effectiveness directly drives the rate of student learning and, as such, teacher quality must be a primary target for school improvement in the United States of America.

Examining teacher quality began in earnest 30 years ago when the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) submitted the landmark report, *A Nation at Risk,* to U.S. Secretary of Education, Terrell H. Bell. The report spotlighted the decline of the American public education system as compared to other industrialized countries and the lack of preparedness of American students for college and the demands of a growing global economy. After 2 years of study, the commissioners concluded that the decline in performance was the result of inadequacies in: content, expectations, time, and teaching. This call to action spurred the standards-based reform movement in an effort to set clear learning targets for students and instructional content targets for teachers. Further, proponents of standards-based reform advocated that: standards must require mastery of advanced content, complexity in reasoning, and multistep problem solving; assessments must align to standards and require students to engage in higher-order thinking; and teachers must increase both content knowledge and pedagogy in order to increase student outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 1995; O'Day & Smith, 1993; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). The standards-based reform movement began to make its way into legislation in the 1990s through the Goals 2000: Educate America Act and the Improving America's Schools Act (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008), both attempting to leverage systematic and systemic efforts to improve America's education system.

In an attempt to offer a strategy for America's educational goals, The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) proposed that by 2006 every

student in America should be provided "with what should be his or her educational birthright: access to competent, caring, qualified teaching in schools organized for success" (p. 10). The commission made five recommendations to accomplish the goal: 1) initiate standards for teachers and students, 2) redesign teacher preparation and professional development, 3) place qualified teachers in every classroom, 4) reward teacher knowledge and skill, and 5) organize schools for student and teacher success. In 2002, Congress sought to address these recommendations through the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), President George W. Bush's reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1963. A major focus of the reauthorization was on holding schools and districts accountable by rewarding or sanctioning them based on student achievement. This approach was intended to motivate schools to improve in the hope that this motivation would translate into improved teaching in classrooms. This effort was well intentioned; however, NCLB offered few provisions for developing and hiring Highly Qualified Teachers to ensure that teachers had the requisite content knowledge and skills to teach effectively. Individual states determined both the student learning and growth standards and the indicators of effective teaching (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

The urgency to increase quality teaching continued to be a priority for Congress. Not long after President Barack Obama was elected in 2008, he signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). ARRA provided $4.35 billion for the Race to the Top (RTT) grant program designed to reward states for innovation and reform efforts that lead to increased student outcomes, closing the achievement gap, improving graduation rates, and preparing students for success in college and careers.

Improving teacher and principal effectiveness based on performance had the second highest point value of components required for the RTT grant applications (U.S. Department of Education, 2009), quickly making teacher evaluation a hot issue for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. This policy emphasis signaled a renewed recognition that, if student learning results are to improve, the quality of teachers and of teaching are the variables that will be instrumental in this improvement.

In an effort to support states and districts in developing new evaluation systems, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation launched the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project to investigate how to measure effective teaching. Most notable of their findings is that effective teaching can indeed be measured. Specifically, valuable and reliable feedback can be gathered for teachers using a well-designed student perception survey and multiple classroom observations scored by different observers that can be averaged (MET, 2013). With regard to student learning, the MET Project also revealed that students of more effective teachers not only performed better on standardized state exams, but they also performed better on more cognitively challenging assessments in math and English. These findings corroborate previous research suggesting that a teacher's effectiveness is a determining factor in student achievement (Aaronson et al., 2007; Rivkin et al., 2005; Rockoff, 2004; Sanders & Rivers, 1996) and that teacher evaluation can distinguish effective teachers from less effective teachers (Steele, Hamilton, & Stecher, 2010).

From *A Nation at Risk* to Race to the Top, the disparity in student outcomes as a result of the variance in teacher quality persist, as does the urgency to improve teacher quality—specifically, the quality of instruction that a teacher delivers. Improving

instruction may require that teachers eliminate certain practices from their teaching repertoire in favor of practices that have a higher return rate in terms of student learning. In most cases, teachers will have to learn new skills and behaviors, which requires effective professional development, support, and direction from the instructional leader, and on-going feedback about performance. The current research study attempts to clarify the nature of the feedback process used with teachers to improve instruction through feedback, a principal's ability to connect a vision for improvement with feedback for improvement, and the influence a principal has in improving instruction.

Improving Instruction Through Teacher Learning

If teachers are at the heart of school improvement, and must carry out the demands of school reform, then it is not surprising that professional development is a major focus of reform initiatives (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). According to Guskey (2002), there are three main goals of professional development: "change in classroom practices of teachers, change in their attitudes and beliefs, and change in learning outcomes of students" (p. 383). Professional development or teacher learning occurs in many aspects of practice. For example, teachers learn from the responses of students in their classrooms, a conversation with a peer about a targeted practice or student data, a conversation with a supervisor about teaching performance, a formal workshop or conference, or personal reflection about practice. Often these learning occurrences are disjointed and lack a targeted and systematic process for improving practice. For this reason, Wilson and Berne (1999) describe professional learning as a "patchwork of opportunities—formal and informal, mandatory and

voluntary, serendipitous and planned—stitched together into a fragmented and incoherent curriculum" (p. 174). This lack of coherence contributes to the fits and starts of reform implementation by increasing the complexity of reform tasks, thereby linking the success of reform to the success of professional learning (Little, 1993).

A survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that 95% of teachers participated in 8 hours or more of a professional development workshop, conference, or training during the 1999-2000 school year. Though common, these traditional forms of professional development are often criticized as being ineffective because they do not provide teachers with enough time to learn and practice new content or methods in order to successfully implement the changes in the classroom (Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998).

While there have been a large number of studies conducted on professional development, the majority of studies that have focused on "best practices" have largely been descriptive and based on expert experiences. These studies do however suggest that consensus on what constitutes high quality professional development is emerging in the literature (see Cocoran, 1995; Darling-Hammond & McLauglin, 1995; Elmore, 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Loucks-Horsley et al., 1998; National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, 1996). The most common cited characteristics of effective professional development are also summarized in NCLB. According to NCLB, high quality professional development is: 1) intensive, on-going, and job embedded; 2) content focused in the subject areas that teachers are teaching; 3) aligned to state academic content standards, student achievement standards, and assessment; 4) focused on effective instructional strategies that are based in scientific research; 5) aligned to school

and district goals; and 6) evaluated regularly for impact on increased teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. These characteristics represent a growing body of research focused on the features and structures of professional development, and how they impact teacher learning and student achievement.

Professional Development Features

The features of professional development relate to the substance of the professional development. In other words, the content focus and goals that the professional development is aiming to accomplish.

Content. The standards-based reform movement emphasized the importance of teachers having a deep understanding of the content, or subject matter, that they are teaching in order to teach the complexities of the content to a diverse student population (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Professional development that focused on content knowledge and how students learn the content was a necessary shift from professional development that had a predominant focus on pedagogy. This shift brought to light the lack of content specific teaching that most teachers have, propelling the argument for professional development that attends to both (Corcoran, 1995).

The majority of research related to professional development and content has focused primarily on math and science. In a review developed for the National Institute of Science Education, Kennedy (1998) looked exclusively at the influence that the content of science professional development programs had on student learning. She found that professional development programs that focused on building the content knowledge of the teacher had smaller influences on student learning than those that focused on

teachers' content knowledge, the curriculum, and how students learn the content. Cohen and Hill (1998) similarly found larger effects on teacher learning and student achievement when professional development focused on specific instructional strategies for teaching math. Garet et al. (2008) also found knowledge gains in teachers and changes in teachers' practice through intensive professional development in reading instruction.

Coherence. Researchers speculate that professional development historically has been implemented as random acts of improvement—not connected to standards or goals. Newman, Smith, Allensorth, and Bryk (2001) make the case that students achieve more in schools where there is a coherent instructional program. A coherent instructional program has three main components: 1) an instructional framework that defines standards for learning, curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessments; 2) professional development opportunities designed to support teachers' implementation and refinement of the framework in the context of their classrooms; and 3) the resources to sustain the use of the framework without competing initiatives (Newman et al., 2001). To this end, Garet and colleagues (2001) surveyed teachers to inquire whether or not teachers were participating in professional development that was aligned to state and district standards and assessments, and if professional development activities were connected to improvement goals and previous learning. When they compared these responses to how the same teachers reported gains in their knowledge and skills, they found a positive relationship ($r = .42$), suggesting that coherence is more likely to increase the knowledge and skills of teachers.

Professional Development Structures

Professional development structures refer to how the professional development activity or learning opportunity is organized in terms of time and format. The structure of professional development can be categorized into two distinct approaches: traditional or reform (Birman, Desimone, Garet, & Porter, 2000). Traditional approaches to professional development include workshops or conferences—commonly referred as the "spray and pray" or "train and hope" method of professional development delivered by an expert outside of the school or district without any follow-up to assess whether or not teachers have transferred the skills into the classroom. Reform approaches to professional development by contrast are learning activities that are embedded in the day-to-day work of teachers (e.g., student interactions, planning lessons, managing instructional materials, and assessing learning), have a collaborative focus (e.g., lesson study, learning community), and provide extended opportunities for guided practice such as coaching (Cohen & Ball, 1999; Corcoran, 1995; Loucks-Horsley et al., 1998). Elmore (2002) argues that reform professional development:

> should be designed to develop the capacity of teachers to work collectively on problems of practice, within their own schools and with practitioners in other settings…This view derives from the assumption that learning is essentially a collaborative, rather than an individual, activity—that educators learn more powerfully in concert with others who are struggling with the same problems…Professional development in the service of improvement requires commitment to consistency and focus over the long term…[with] activities [that are] continuous from one year to the next…[and] as close as possible to where the teaching itself occurs. Proximity to practice also requires that the pedagogy of professional developers be as consistent as possible with the pedagogy that they expect from educators. It has to involve professional developers who, through expert practice, can model what they expect of the people with whom they are working. (Elmore, 2002, p. 8)

This argument illustrates the important features of duration, collaborative learning, and

coaching that are critical for structuring professional development.

Duration. One of the largest investments schools, districts, and states make related to professional development is the time allocated for teacher learning. One of the most well-known projects to demonstrate that the time invested in professional development can lead to teachers changing their beliefs about teaching and learning is the National Science Foundation's Local Systemic Change through Teacher Enhancement (LSC) program that began in 1995 (Banilower, Boyd, Pasley, & Weiss, 2006). The LSC provided 130 targeted professional development hours to teachers throughout the project; duration ranged between 1 and 5 years. A comprehensive review of the project's effectiveness revealed that teachers who participated in the LSC increased their content knowledge and their ability to employ effective instructional strategies when teaching math and science. In another study, Garet and colleagues (2001) examined two aspects of duration: first, the number of contact hours spent engaging in professional learning activities; and second, the span of time (days, weeks, months) over which the activities occurred. They found that each factor, independently and positively, influenced teacher learning.

More recently, a report for the Institute of Education Sciences reviewing nine studies that met the rigorous, evidence standards of the What Works Clearinghouse concluded that teachers who participated in more than 14 hours of professional development showed a positive effect on student learning (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). Of the studies that had 14 or more hours of professional development, the effects were higher when those hours were spread throughout the year (McCutchen et al., 2002) as compared to those concentrated in a summer institute (Marek

& Methven, 1991). These studies confirm that duration is a core feature in planning learning activities that lead to improved teaching results; however, duration alone does not lead to improvement. The time teachers spend in professional development must provide teachers with the opportunity to actively engage in a meaningful analysis of teaching and learning (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002).

Collaborative learning. Fullan (1991) describes reform as "simultaneously technical and social," requiring that professional development place teachers in networks or partnerships in order to engage these aspects of reform and support changes in teaching practices in the classroom (Lieberman, 1996). In a longitudinal study, Desimone et al. (2002) found that professional development is more effective in changing teachers' practices when teachers from the same grade or department and school are able to collectively engage in activities that allow them to obtain feedback about teaching and review student work in relation to the school's reform initiative or improvement goals. Similarly, Wilson and Berne (1999) maintain that in order for teachers to effectively acquire and apply knowledge about teaching, they must have the opportunity to talk about subject matter, student learning, and teaching. These findings compliment the research that a culture of collaborative inquiry that supports ongoing learning increases teachers' self-efficacy and their likelihood of trying new teaching techniques (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Rosehaltz, 1989).

A popular model for creating a culture of collaborative inquiry in schools is the Professional Learning Community, or PLC. While PLCs are not typically described as a professional development model, they are conceptually organized around collaborative learning for improved teaching. In a review of research, Hord (2004) identified five

common dimensions of PLCs: 1) having shared values and vision for student learning; 2) targeting specific teaching practices for intentional collective learning and application; 3) having a structure of supportive and shared leadership that allow teachers to be part of school decision making; 4) providing supportive conditions that provide the physical conditions for teachers to collaborate, and a climate that fosters a positive attitude towards students and schooling; and 5) developing a shared personal practice that utilizes feedback from peers to improve practice. These dimensions support the overarching purpose of PLCs to sustain improvement over time by enhancing teacher effectiveness for the ultimate benefit of students (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006).

Research about the effectiveness of PLCs is largely descriptive, touting the promise of PLCs rather than demonstrating the results on teacher or student learning. Despite the lack of empirical evidence, Little (2006) argues that "no matter how well designed a structured professional development, its track record of success in the classroom owes a debt to the quality of the professional community and other supports at the school level" (p. 20). Additional supports at the school level may include coaching. Coburn and Russell (2008) found that when a school district systematically paired on-going professional development, PLCs, and coaching, teachers' professional interactions had more depth about teaching and student learning that led to instructional improvement versus interactions that focused on the organization of materials. The authors also suggest that the success of the school district's implementation of this model was largely due to the defined role and training of the coach.

Coaching. "Effective training has come to be defined largely by its ability to provide adequate opportunities for practice and to provide for classroom consultation and

coaching as teachers learn to use new ideas" (Little, 1993, p. 132). Coaching, as a school-based professional development structure, is designed to increase instructional capacity through activities directly related to teaching such as one-to-one observation, modeling effective instruction, and feedback about teachers' instructional practices (Neufeld & Roper, 2003; Poglinco et al., 2003). As such, coaches are being employed in schools throughout the country. The work of coaches in schools continues to evolve requiring that coaches serve various roles. Depending on the school and district's reform agenda and the skills of the teacher, the coach may serve as a resource provider, mentor, data specialist, instructional specialist, content/curriculum specialist, intervention specialist, assessment specialist, and/or school leader for change. The coaching model or process in which these diverse roles are employed varies across schools and districts. Despite the common presence of coaches in schools, the empirical body of evidence of coaching's impact is still in its infancy. To date, most studies on coaching have examined coaching effects on teacher learning compared to other forms of professional development.

Joyce and Showers are often cited as the first researchers to explore the promise of coaching and its measureable effects on teacher learning. Most notable is their research examining the effect of the mode of professional development on teacher learning and whether or not the knowledge and skills from professional development were transferred to practice in the classroom (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Presenting information, theory, or a demonstration alone did not transfer to the classroom, and had an effect size of .00. This finding means that, overall, most teachers did not effectively use the skill that they were taught when they returned to their classrooms. Combining theory and demonstration, or theory with demonstration and practice, also had an effect size of .00

with very little transfer of training into classrooms. Theory combined with demonstration, practice, and feedback had a transfer effect size of .39. This finding implies that when teachers had the opportunity to practice and receive feedback they were more likely to use the target strategy in their classrooms. And, most dramatic of the authors' findings, was that, when theory was combined with demonstration, practice, and feedback, followed by coaching, teachers in the classroom had a transfer effect of 1.68. This is an exceptionally large effect in social sciences according to Cohen (1977). Cohen described effects of 0.20 as small, effects of 0.50 as moderate and effects of 0.80 as large. An effect size of this magnitude would move a hypothetical "average" teacher's implementation of a professional practice from the 50th percentile (middle of the average range) to over the 95th percentile (a very high level of implementation) compared to other teachers (using statistics derived from a standard-normal curve). This magnitude of effect is both statistically significant and practically meaningful.

Most studies on coaching have examined coaching effects through descriptive and qualitative analysis. For example, Poglinco and colleagues (2003) from the Consortium for Policy Research in Education examined how coaching was implemented as part of the rollout of Readers and Writers Workshops in 27 of America's Choice schools. Using classroom observation and interview data, Poglinco et al. (2003) described the challenges and benefits of coaching. The challenges identified included the time to coach, as coaches were often pulled in many directions; lack of clarity about the coach's role; teacher resistance to the using the target teaching strategy, routine, or program; lack of support from building administrator; and knowledge base of the coach—some coaches did not feel adequately prepared to coach an unfamiliar strategy or program, nor did all

coaches feel comfortable giving teachers feedback. The overall benefits of implementing a coaching model were that target teaching practices were implemented at a higher rate in classrooms where the teachers had received coaching (Poglinco et al. 2003).

There have been few studies that demonstrate the effects of coaching on student achievement. Three studies are worth noting because of their rigorous examination of coaching on literacy growth. First, Garet et al. (2008) conducted a study involving 270 second grade teachers who received 48 hours of professional development. Half the teachers also received approximately 60 hours of coaching. The teachers who received coaching did rate higher on a specific teacher knowledge test; however, there were no significant gains in student achievement when compared to the teachers who did not receive coaching (Garet et al., 2008). A second study examined coaching effects in middle schools across eight school districts. Marsh et al. (2008) found there was a small but significant relationship (Math: $p = 0.073$; Reading: $p = 0.083$) between student achievement in math and reading and the frequency in which teachers reviewed assessment data with coaches. A third more recent, longitudinal study of 287 teachers in kindergarten through second grades across eight states demonstrated that coaching had a significant effect in student reading achievement over a 4-year period (Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010). In fact, each year of the study the effects of coaching on student achievement grew larger; 16% larger learning gains than baseline in year 1, 28% larger learning gains than baseline in year 2, and 32% larger learning gains than baseline in year 3. The authors posit that the positive outcomes of their study were in part due to the coaches receiving extensive training prior to coaching teachers and the continued skill development of the coaches over the 4-year study period (Biancarosa et al., 2010). These

results suggest that coaching coaches, and coaches' professional development in general, is critical to the success of any coaching model.

The Missing Link

The evolution of professional learning into a collaborative learning structure and access to on-site coaching make improving instruction seem like a tangible goal; however, what appears to be missing from the consensus view of professional learning is an explicit emphasis on performance feedback as a process for learning and making decisions about improvement. Certainly, the use of feedback in reform type professional development is implied or even mentioned in the case of coaching literature; however, there does not appear to be an emphasis in the professional learning literature on feedback as a link to learning.

Curiously, this omission from the professional learning and coaching literature is that there are models for providing ongoing feedback and improvement to education systems or to educators that have been proposed in the past approximately 30 years. These models have been researched and practiced in the field of school psychology and are implicitly and explicitly referenced as models for problem solving or data based decision-making. Most commonly cited models include Behavioral Consultation (Bergan & Kratochwill, 1990); the IDEAL problem solving model (Bransford & Stein, 1984); Functional Analysis of Behavior/Functional Behavioral Assessment (Repp & Horner, 1999; Tilly et al., 1998); The Scientist Practitioner Model (Barlow, Hayes, & Nelson, 1984); Curriculum-Based Measurement (Shinn, 1989); Applied Behavior Analysis (Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968), Action Research (Calhoun, 1994); and Heartland AEA's Problem

Solving Model (Reschly & Ysseldyke, 1995). Each model contains unique features and, in some cases, the models are driven by specific theoretical orientations or philosophies of science. No matter which specific approach or model for ongoing feedback is considered, four common questions guide decision making: 1) What is the problem? 2) Why is it happening? 3) What should be done about it? and 4) Did it work? Taken together, these questions are referred to in the literature as the problem solving method (Tilly, 2007). These questions and models have collectively been validated as being highly effective models for providing feedback regarding educational practice.

The most compelling research on these models that demonstrates teacher change as a result of feedback is the research on using performance feedback within a behavioral consultation model to increase the integrity of behavior interventions and reduce problem behavior. This research suggests that when process data (implementation or instructional data) and outcome data (student achievement data) are collected, graphically displayed, and presented to teachers, performance feedback is more effective (Balcazar, Hopkins, & Suarez, 1985). A growing number of studies validates that performance feedback has increased intervention integrity, or instruction, thereby decreasing the targeted problem behaviors and, in many cases, increasing academic achievement (see Cossiart, Hall, & Hopkins, 1973; Moore, Schaut, & Fritzges, 1978; Mortenson & Witt, 1998; Noell, Witt, Gilbertson, Ranier, & Freeland, 1997; Colvin, Flannery, Sugai, & Monegan, 2009). These studies are compelling because they illustrate the combination of a targeted student need with an evidence-based intervention and precise feedback about the execution of the intervention that leads to improved learning for the teacher and the student.

The use of performance feedback for treatment integrity is a micro exploration of

how feedback contributes to improving teacher effectiveness. A macro lens requires applying the same logic to a broader system or context for learning—in this case how feedback influences the learning process in general and how feedback to teachers specifically influences their teaching.

Feedback for Learning

Feedback can be defined as the process of receiving information about aspects of one's performance in order to influence the transfer or maintenance of skills and behaviors (Arco, 1991; Balcazar et al., 1985; Fleming & Sulzer-Azaroff, 1989). Winne and Butler (1994) state that "feedback is information with which a learner can confirm, add to, overwrite, tune, or restructure information in memory, whether that information is domain knowledge, meta-cognitive knowledge, beliefs about self and tasks, or cognitive tactics and strategies" (p. 5740). The goal of feedback is to reduce the discrepancy between a learner's current understanding and performance and desired understanding and performance (Hattie, 2009). While there has been a significant amount of research on the influence feedback has on student learning and implications for teaching, less attention has been given to the specific characteristics of feedback that could be constructed into a model to scaffold learning for teachers. Additionally, the majority of research about feedback has concentrated on student learning and performance rather than adult learning and performance. Given the current state of the literature, this section will discuss how feedback might be applied to adult professional learning to increase teacher effectiveness. This application is based on the assumption that the underlying processes and conditions for adult learning are fundamentally similar to that of student

learning.

If feedback is to close the gap between a learner's current performance and desired performance, it must answer three questions: 1) Where am I going? 2) Where am I now? and 3) Where to next? (adapted from Hattie, 2009). These questions are important because they organize feedback into a process that is targeted and meaningful for both the giver and the receiver of feedback. In other words, these questions are intended to make feedback actionable. Actionable feedback is specific information about performance that when "acted upon" will lead to improvement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). These questions both simplify and add specificity to the problem solving process—1) What is the problem? 2) Why is it happening? 3) What should be done about it? and, 4) Did it work?

Where Am I Going?

The first question in an actionable model of feedback relates to setting goals based on intended learning outcomes, or a success criteria (Hattie, 2012). In a classroom, asking this question ideally happens with each lesson so that students know the target and can self-monitor their progress and performance (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Teachers, on the other hand, may set goals about their own teaching on an annual basis if required by the building principal or as part of the professional evaluation process. Goals that teachers set are likely to include a target for student proficiency (e.g., At least 90% of students will meet grade level benchmarks in reading and math) and/or professional goals (e.g., Will improve ability to ask higher order thinking questions). Goals that teachers set might be an end point for what they want to accomplish, but they do little to assist

teachers or administrators in knowing what to do to assist teachers in moving toward their goals. Additionally, most professional goals set by teachers are not measureable and may not reflect evidence-based instructional practices or school improvement priorities.

Similar to how goal-setting and feedback are requisite for improvement of teachers, these factors are also critical for success of the entire school operation. Leaders must be adept at this process at both the teacher and the organizational level and must carefully consider how these levels interact with each other. Setting clear goals is vital for the success of an organization (Kanter, 1984). Further, the ability of school leaders to set a clear vision and corresponding goals impact student achievement. Robinson (2011) argues that, to ensure teachers in a school have the capacity to achieve improvement goals, leaders should set performance and learning goals. Performance goals are organized around achieving a specific outcome, whereas learning goals represent the process of learning how to complete the tasks or acquire the skills necessary for meeting the performance goal (Latham & Locke, 2007). For a school to operate in a directional manner (e.g., to improve student performance), it makes sense that individual teacher goals directly relate to what they need to learn in order to meet the school's goals. In this way, the goals of the school and the goals of the teacher interact.

The process of setting organizational goals in schools can be strengthened if there is a common instructional framework that articulates the curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment practices necessary to achieve performance goals (Robinson, 2011). This framework encompasses areas of focus for the entire school. Additionally, the framework articulates areas where teachers must focus their goals to improve student performance. The framework can then serve as a basis for setting learning goals that are

specific to reducing the discrepancy between what teachers currently know and what they need to know in order to successfully meet student performance objectives.

Where Am I Now?

Answering the question, "Where am I now?" within the context of a common instructional framework and in relation to a set learning goal can best be answered by collecting process and outcome data and offering feedback about performance (Balcazar et al., 1985). An objective and informative way to collect process data, or implementation data, comes from directly observing specific teaching behaviors that can be quantified in either their frequency (e.g., number of opportunities students have to respond to instruction) or discerning their presence or absence (e.g., teacher uses an attention signal). These data can then be used in conjunction with student achievement data to provide on-going feedback about where the teacher is currently performing in relation to the learning goal and allow for decisions to made about where to go next to improve performance.

Where to Next?

After data are collected to determine current progress towards learning goals, the subsequent step is to decide "Where to next," or what action to take as a result of data analysis. Decisions should be guided by knowledge of which actions will increase the probability of meeting the learning goal (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Where the learner is along the continuum of building automaticity with the newly acquired skill will assist in determining the level of support or additional instruction and feedback that is

necessary for on-going application of the skill (Burns, Riley-Tillman, & VanDerHeyden, 2012).

Attributes of Feedback

The questions outlined in the actionable feedback process are a nonattributive, data-based strategy for providing feedback to teachers about improving instruction; however, the simplicity of the process does not account for the quality or effectiveness of the feedback delivered or the conditions that create a learner's openness to feedback. In order to study the influence feedback might have on learning, the dimensions or attributes of feedback must be specified. Van Houten (1980) categorized feedback attributes as 1) the nature of feedback, 2) the temporal dimensions of feedback, and 3) who delivers the feedback. Organizing feedback variables into these three categories will allow for careful study on the aspects of feedback that contribute most to learning.

Nature of feedback. The nature of feedback refers to the type of feedback being used to advance learning. Hattie (2007; 2012) claims that there are four levels of feedback that influence the type of feedback used and its effectiveness. First, feedback at the task and product level focuses on how well a task is performed. Feedback at this level is more corrective in nature as the learner is acquiring knowledge and building automaticity. Examples of feedback at this level include indicating a correct or incorrect response, providing suggestions for improvement related to the task, or building more knowledge about the task.

The second level of feedback concentrates on the process used to complete the task. This type of feedback is more facilitative in that the teacher is asking questions

about the strategies the learner has used in the learning process to solicit from or provide cues to the learner related to what is correct or effective and what is not. Examples of feedback at this level may include asking questions that help the learner connect ideas or providing the learner with strategies for identifying errors.

Third is the self-regulation level of feedback, or monitoring progress towards the learning goal. At this level, the learner directs the feedback based on the level of engagement to the learning task and goal. For self-regulation to occur, the learner must have the ability to accurately self-assess and be willing to seek and accept feedback as necessary. This level differs from the process level in that the learner has developed the metacognitive skills to independently connect ideas, evaluate ideas, and identify errors in thinking. An example of feedback at this level includes asking the learner reflective questions about the strategies that the learner employed.

These first three levels of feedback capture the complexity and the power of corrective feedback. The evidence base documents that providing a learner with corrective feedback or cues that provide information on whether a response is correct or incorrect is the most powerful type of feedback for learning (Bennett & Kell, 1989; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996; Lysakowski & Walberg, 1982; Tenenbaum & Goldring, 1989; Walberg, 1982). Each of the first three levels of feedback involves corrective feedback. The difference is the process for identifying the errors and providing a learner with information about how to complete a task more effectively and accurately (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Therein lies the power and influence of corrective feedback on learning. Hattie (2012) summarizes, "Acknowledging errors allows for opportunities. Error is the difference between what we *now* know and can do and what we *could* know

and do…[Errors are] fundamental to moving towards success" (pp. 115-16).

Finally, the fourth level of feedback is directed at the "self" in the form of praise. This feedback is personal to the learner (e.g., "You're great," or "Excellent work") and generally does not contain specific information related to the task. A number of researchers do not acknowledge praise as an effective form of feedback because it distracts the learner from the task and dilutes the power of corrective feedback (Kamins & Dweck, 1999; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996); however, behavior-specific praise is effective at increasing desired behavior, including engagement in instruction (Brophy, 1983).

Temporal dimensions of feedback. The temporal dimensions of feedback include frequency and timing (Scheeler, Ruhl, & McAfee, 2004). Most research related to the timing of feedback has examined the effects of immediate versus delayed feedback for learning and there is evidence to support positive effects for both, making it a challenge to draw definitive conclusions (Clariana, 1999; Kulik & Kulik, 1988; Schroth & Lund, 1993). Mathan and Koedinger (2002) suggest that learner capability and need should determine whether feedback is immediate or delayed. In a study comparing immediate and delayed feedback to preservice teachers, Coulter and Grossen (1997) found that feedback about a lesson that was given immediately after the lesson or within the same day was more effective than delaying feedback to the following 1 to 3 days. Research on the frequency of feedback has not provided enough guidance to suggest an optimum schedule of feedback, but it does suggest that more effective teachers receive higher rates of feedback and that the most common form of feedback given is praise (Bond, Smith, Baker, & Hattie, 2000). Further, research also indicates that the lack of feedback about performance negatively impacts the retention of highly effective teachers

(The New Teacher Project, 2012; Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009).

Delivery of feedback. The delivery of feedback refers to who delivers feedback, the mode of delivery, and the techniques used for delivering feedback. Experience suggests that teachers may receive both formal and informal feedback from a supervisor. They may also receive feedback about instruction from a coach or a peer or a consultant. Additionally, teachers receive feedback from students' responses to instruction—verbal, written, or physical—that provides information about students' understanding and hopefully informs instruction. To date, there have not been any studies comparing the effect of feedback offered to teachers from individuals within varying roles. Evidence noted in the previous sections highlighted the effects of coaching on teacher learning and improved instruction. The lack of evidence regarding the impact of who delivers feedback is not a surprise given the paucity of research conducted on feedback about instructional practices as a whole.

The Challenge of Feedback

> The challenge with feedback is that we:
>
> > have biases towards receiving feedback that [we] want: we seek positive co-occurrences; we create self-fulfilling prophecies; we fail to recognize mistakes in hindsight; we seek feedback consistent with self-image; we accept the positive and scrutinize the negative; we code positive broadly and negative narrowly; we attribute positive to self and negative to anything else; and we misremember feedback. (Hattie, 2012, p. 136)

Chris Argyris (1991) describes this challenge as a paradox of human behavior in which people believe they are behaving based on a set of rules or principles, yet they consistently act contradictory to those principles. This is known as the difference between an "espoused" theory of action and a "theory-in-use" (Argyris & Schon, 1974).

An education example of this is a study conducted by Wickstrom and colleagues (1998) who observed 0 out of 33 teachers implementing an intervention with more than 10% treatment integrity after being trained; yet when asked to report their level of implementation, the majority of the teachers reported that they were implementing the components of the intervention as intended. This illustrates the gap between the espoused theory of action of the teachers in the study and the actual theory in use as directly observed by the consultants, thereby making a case for more systematic structures for delivering performance feedback. Implementing systematic structures for delivering performance feedback requires leadership that focuses on the learning of teachers and is conducive to supporting professional learning in the school.

Leading Professional Learning

Research on effective schools conducted in the 1980s (e.g., Andrews & Soder, 1987; Edmonds, 1979) highlighted the important role of the principal in changing systems to reform schools (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). In a recent TED talk (2012), Atul Gawande, surgeon, author, and public health advocate, suggests, "making systems work is the greatest task of our generation." He reasons that systems improvement is highly complex because it requires diverse people working together to direct their specialized capabilities towards a common goal. This level of complexity requires group success (Gawande, 2012). In an education system, this translates into coordinated, systemic efforts by groups of teachers aimed to ensure that students experience the intended instruction and interventions. The leadership necessary for this level of complexity goes beyond that of a single, charismatic or heroic leader. The work of systemic change is the

"slogging" that takes place after the innovation or reform vision has been set and communicated (Levin, 2008). Group success with slog work requires collaboration and thoughtful attention to building collective capacity in order to sustain reform efforts.

Given the important role of the principal in improving schools, the connection between leaders supporting teachers' learning in order to increase student learning seems intuitive. Moreover, we know more now than we ever have before about effective instructional practices that lead to student gains (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Hattie, 2009; Rosenshine, 2010). The charge, then, for leaders is to ensure that these effective practices are employed in every classroom.

In 2004, The Wallace Foundation commissioned Leithwood and colleagues to explore the effects of successful leadership on student learning, determine whether or not there is a common set of "basic" leadership practices used by successful leaders, and to study how successful leadership exercises its influence on student learning. The authors conducted a review of empirical research using a framework that assumes the leadership role is a critical factor in mediating the variance between teacher performance and skill, working conditions, and external demands. Based on their review, Leithwood et al. argue that leadership effects, both direct and indirect, account for 25% of the total variation of a school's effects on learning, making it the second largest contributor to student learning, just behind classroom instruction. The authors submit that there are three sets of practices that successful leaders employ: 1) setting directions for improvement, 2) developing people in the areas of effective instruction, and 3) redesigning organizations to sustain performance. These sets of practices represent common themes across the literature and are described in detail below.

Setting Directions

The emphasis on defining a vision and mission for school improvement as well as setting clear goals or expectations is consistently represented as a critical leadership practice (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Goldring & Pasternak, 1994; Hallinger & Heck, 1998). In a review of 37 studies, Witziers et al. (2003) found that defining and communicating a mission had a positive correlation with student achievement (.19). Similarly, Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd (2009) reported that when leaders established clear goals and expectations, there was a moderate effect on student outcomes (d = .42). Critical to both findings was the level of specificity with which the goals outlined the targets for student performance and the instructional routines expected in the classroom (Robinson, 2011). When leaders were not specific with goals and rather espoused a general or abstract vision for improvement, teachers responded negatively (Barnett, McCormick, & Connors, 2001).

In addition to measurable goals, a leader's ability to organize a coherent framework of instruction that articulates an alignment between state, district, and school goals as well as the connections between those goals, standards for student learning, assessment of student learning, instructional strategies, and curriculum programs is essential if leaders want to maximize their impact on student achievement (Garet et al., 2001; Newman et al., 2001). Failure to align or allowing teachers to opt out of a coherent framework of instruction puts achievement at risk (Timperley, 2005).

Developing People

Leaders who are involved in professional learning with their teachers not only have a better understanding of effective practices and curriculum, but they also are able to gain insight as to the challenges that teachers face and what they need to be successful. Further, when leaders organized and participated in professional development, the likelihood of teachers transferring what they learned to the classroom to benefit students increased significantly (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007). Robinson et al. (2009) maintain that promoting and participating in teacher learning and development has a demonstrable impact on student achievement and report a mean effect size of .84 (derived from 17 effect sizes in six studies). One such study that compared leaders in high achieving, high gain schools to leaders in low achieving, low gain schools, reported that leaders in high achieving schools participated more actively in teacher learning and development than principals in low achieving schools (Andrews & Soder, 1987). These findings are consistent with findings from Sheppard (1996), who synthesized the evidence available regarding principal impact on teachers' instruction. He found that principals who promoted professional development were most influential in improving teachers' instruction. In general, leaders appear to have a significant influence on the behavior of teachers and how they perform (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Heck, Larson, & Marcoulides, 1990; Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990).

Redesigning Organizations

Redesigning organizations in order to sustain improvement can best be described as creating a culture that combines collaborative capacity-building with a focus on

instruction and student outcomes (Marks & Printy, 2003). This means integrating all of the aforementioned research on teacher learning, feedback, and leadership practices systemically in order to see the structures that underlie the intricacies of a learning organization in order to discern high from low leverage change (Senge, 1990). This type of high functioning culture requires leaders to embed specific leadership capabilities holistically into the practice of setting goals, developing people, and collaborating with teachers. Robinson et al. (2009) identified four, evidence-based leadership capabilities: 1) making decisions based on knowledge of effective instruction, 2) the ability to analyze and solve complex problems, 3) effectively building relational trust, and 4) engaging in "open-to-learning conversations."

Making decisions. If leaders are expected to make decisions about instruction for the benefit of students, then they must have a depth of understanding of standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Additionally, they must be able to collect reliable data in order to evaluate the interaction between standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Instructional knowledge and data should drive hiring decisions, allocation of resources, and deployment of supports for improving teaching and learning, including how to utilize effective models of professional development (see previous section on professional learning).

Solving complex problems. Leaders of continuous improvement are faced with complex problems on a regular basis, thus it is critical for leaders to develop expertise in problem solving. The problem solving process mentioned previously can serve as a starting point for analyzing why a problem is occurring by exploring educationally relevant and alterable variables to determine a solution (K. Howell, personal

communication, September 22, 2006). Leithwood and Steinbach (1995) found that principals with expert problem solving skills were more likely to check their own assumptions and seek to understand the perception of others, connect problems to broader school goals and values, communicate calmly and honestly, and seek collaborative solutions.

Building relational trust. Relational trust influences the effort, risk taking, and collective commitment that teachers are willing to give to the complex task of improving student outcomes. No matter how deep a leader's instructional knowledge and problem solving skills may be, his/her impact will be limited if trusting relationships are not built. To develop trust, leaders can demonstrate respect for others, personal regard for others, competence in the role, and personal integrity by modeling appropriate behavior, following through when school expectations are not met, ensuring that talk and action are consistent with each other, and challenging the unproductive attitudes and behaviors of others (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

Engaging in open-to-learning conversations. Open-to-learning conversations refer to the interpersonal skills and values that a leader must possess for building relational trust, engaging in constructive problem talk, and the ability to disclose, evaluate, and revise theories of action (Robinson, 1993). The open-to-learning model is based on the work of Chris Argyris who has done extensive research on organizational learning and the interpersonal effectiveness of leaders. As the name suggests, open-to-learning conversations are conversations that allow for parties to express their views and offer feedback openly devoid of assumptions or judgments in order to make decisions based on quality information and quality thinking (Robinson et al., 2009). This model

clarifies that feedback is a process dealing with problems of "dynamic complexity" rather than a linear stream from the giver of feedback to the receiver (Senge, 1990). As a leadership capability, open-to-learning conversations add another dimension to exploring feedback as a necessary component for improving instruction.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework was developed to illustrate the impact that a principal may have on student outcomes through feedback about teachers' practices (see Figure 1). Based on the review of the aforementioned literature, this framework highlights that a principal's greatest influence on student outcomes is the result of improving teacher effectiveness. The framework maps two pathways to student outcomes. Both pathways begin with effective principal leadership setting feedback conditions. The first pathway is depicted with a solid line and applies the logic of the literature that effective principals offer feedback that causes a teacher to try something new or adjust a teaching practice that positively improves student achievement. The second pathway is depicted with a dotted line and applies the reality that principals often offer feedback that is dismissed which means that a teacher's practice may not improve and student results are varying.

Whether or not a principal's feedback causes a teacher to act is nestled in something the principal does. What the principal does to influence action, or the feedback conditions, is what this study seeks to understand.

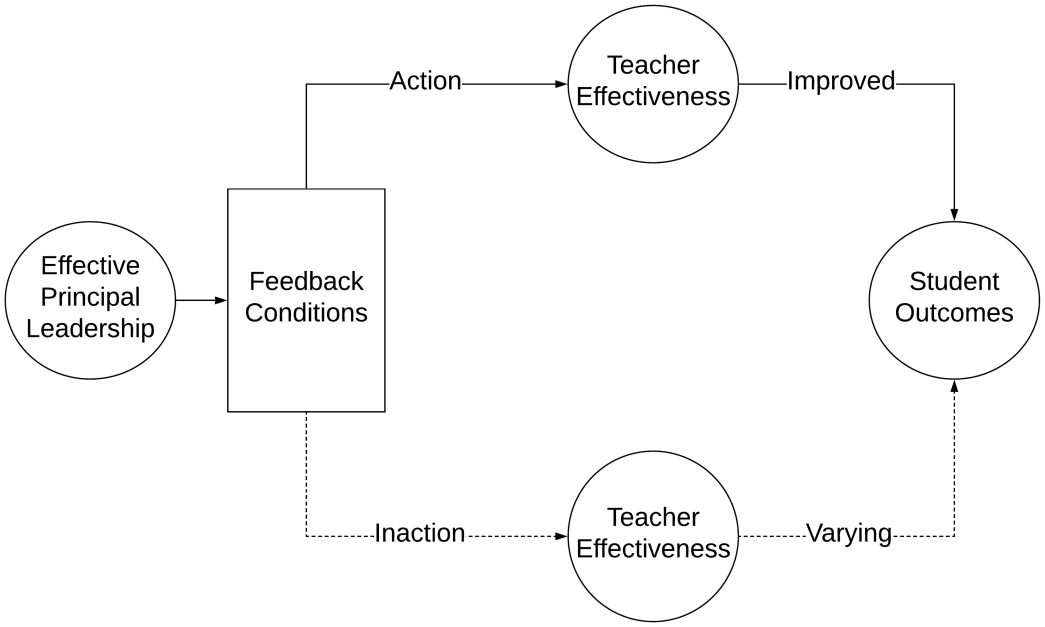

Figure 1. This figure illustrates that a principal sets conditions in which feedback is actionable and leads to improved teacher effectiveness and student outcomes or not.

Conclusions

Teachers matter. What they do and what they do not do in their classrooms impacts students' academic trajectories. Improving teacher quality is the best chance school leaders have to directly effect student achievement. In order to improve teacher quality, principals need to understand what instructional practices will yield the greatest results and they must learn how to facilitate teachers learning the instructional practices. Learning new skills requires high rates of feedback and if principals are to provide actionable feedback that influences instruction, then the features of actionable feedback must be clearly articulated. The goal of this study was to further conceptualize actionable feedback in the context of adult learning within a school setting.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to further examine the nature of the feedback process used with teachers to improve instruction, a principal's ability to connect a vision for improvement with feedback for improvement, and the influence a principal has in improving instruction through feedback. This study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. What type of feedback does a principal provide to teachers about instructional practice?
2. What processes does a principal use to provide instructional feedback to teachers?
3. How is the feedback process for improving teachers' practices related to a principal's ability to set clear improvement goals?
4. In what ways are teacher practices influenced by the feedback for improving instruction provided by a principal?

Research Strategy

To address the research questions above, an embedded case study was conducted (Yin, 2014). Case study research is used to explore complex social phenomena such as small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes, or school performance

within a real-world perspective (Yin, 2014). The social phenomenon explored in this study was the process school leaders (principals) use to provide feedback to teachers in order to influence instructional practice. This phenomenon lends itself to qualitative inquiry because the topic of research is "socially constructed, complex and ever changing" (Glesne, 1999, p. 5). Qualitative case study research is viewed as a bounded system, in which the case is bound by context, time, activity, and/or definition (Creswell, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995). Merriam (2001) refers to boundedness as "fencing in" what is being studied. The bounded system of this case is an individual principal at an elementary school.

Specifically, the type of case for this study can be described as an instrumental case used to facilitate the understanding of how feedback is used to influence change in teacher performance or instructional practice. Stake (1995) uses the term instrumental case study to describe a case that provides insight into an issue or helps to refine a theory by situating the case as secondary to understanding the larger issue. The larger issue is improving instruction and the theory being refined is that actionable feedback increases learning or influences changes in teacher practice from less effective instructional strategies to more effective instructional strategies. Instrumental cases require a deep view of the context in order to understand the external interest (Stake, 1995). The depth of inquiry for this case was achieved using an embedded design. An embedded design refers to the subunits of analysis within each case. An embedded case study provides an opportunity for more extensive analysis and enhances the insight into the case (Yin, 2014). The context for the case study was an elementary school, the case was the principal of the elementary school and the subunits of the embedded case analysis were

the 11 teachers within the school who elected to participate in the study. The embedded design increases the complexity of the case and allows for deeper exploration of the phenomenon because of the subunits of analysis. An embedded design also allows for greater operational detail in the collection and analysis of data as compared to a holistic design which is often more abstract and less clear (Yin, 2014). Due to the level of depth and complexity of this case study, only one case, or principal, was selected.

Selection

Because the goal of qualitative research is enriching the understanding of an experience, selection of "fertile exemplars of the experience" is critical (Polkinghorne, 2005). A critical case sampling strategy was used to select the site for the embedded case study. Critical case sampling is often used in single-case designs because it allows the researcher to select the site that will yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge (Patton, 2002). Critical cases are used to make logical generalizations because "if it happens there, it will happen anywhere," hence the main idea of a critical case (Patton, 2002). The purpose for selecting the setting, site, and participants in this case study are described in detail below.

Setting

The setting for this study was an elementary school in a mid-size suburban public school district in the western United States. Marshall and Rossman (2006) describe an ideal site as having: 1) entry, 2) presence of interest in the study, 3) the ability for the researcher to build trusting relationships with the participants, 4) the ability to conduct

and report the study ethically, and 5) assurances that the data collected is of quality and credible. The school district selected meets the description of an ideal site for this particular study. Entry to the site and the ability to build trusting relationships with the participants was possible because I am an employee of the school district. This level of access to the participants allowed me to stay close to the research, which likely resulted in better data quality (Toma, 2000). Challenges related to my role as an employee in the school district are addressed in the Reflexivity and Ethics sections. Further, the superintendent of this school district had a high interest in the research and wanted evidence-based recommendations on how to increase leaders' abilities to offer quality feedback that leads to improvement in classroom instruction.

As an employee of the school district, trust with some of the participants had already been established, but it was by no means universal. Having background knowledge of the culture and context of the site, including a common vocabulary and understanding of day-to-day operations and procedures, served as a foundation for forming trusting relationships with participants. Careful measures were taken to ensure that the site selected did not hinder my ability to conduct and report the study ethically (see Reflexivity section).

Site Selection

Mountainside Elementary School was selected as the critical case for this study because the culture of the school has an openness about instructional practice and improvement that is very unique. The principal at Mountainside elementary had been at the school for 8 years and had been a principal for over 20 years. The school served

approximately 375 students in kindergarten through 5th grades. Students were predominantly white (79%) and at least half of the students received free or reduced lunch. There were 15 classroom teachers ranging in experience from 1 year to 30 years.

I got to know this school in early 2011 when the leadership team came to a team training that I facilitated. They were one of 15 schools participating in the training that day. Teams were asked to complete an in depth self-assessment and data review to determine the effectiveness of core instruction. Effectiveness was defined as at least 80% of students meeting grade level benchmarks in reading and math as measured by a standardized screening assessment. The schools in attendance were disappointed to learn that their self-assessment data and screening data suggested that core instruction was not effective. Because of the feelings associated with the formation of a new district, teams seemed uneasy dialoguing about their data because they were still unsure of my motives as a district administrator. It was an emotionally taxing day for all involved because it became clear to the principals and teachers that the elementary world they knew was about to change.

Mountainside Elementary's team lingered that day and asked me to sit down with them. Through the self-assessment process, they realized that they were not seeing gains in student achievement and wondered if they "fixed" some of the components that they scored low on in the self-assessment, could achievement increase? The team then shared that they did not know how to fix those low-scoring components and asked for help. Aside from the fact that actually asking for help was extremely rare at that time due to the turmoil of the district split, I was struck by the attitude of the majority of the team. They were not defensive about their data; they were deeply concerned about their students and

were genuinely asking if there was a better way.

We scheduled some time together and put an action plan in place for implementing some new programs, intervention structures, and progress monitoring. My staff provided on-site training and coaching and met regularly with the teachers and the principal. During this process, the majority of the teachers did not complain and they were extremely open to feedback. Suggestions for improvement were generally implemented pretty quickly and the teachers were excited to report their successes. My staff and I observed the interactions between the principal and teachers and were continually surprised by how well everyone seemed to get along. I think one of the reasons we were so surprised was because the principal did not fit our stereotypes of a model instructional leader. She physically presented herself more like a teacher in terms of dress and language. Her behavior at administrator meetings was considered by many of her colleagues to be unprofessional. She cracked bad jokes at inopportune times, spoke inarticulately and blurted out, and could often be found doodling or with her head down. I observed this behavior early on and wondered how she became a principal. Then I had the opportunity to see her in action and watch the entire faculty rally around her vision. This experience completely challenged my assumptions about what leadership should look and sound like.

Since that training in 2011, Mountainside Elementary has made consistent gains in achievement. In fact, within 3 years, they demonstrated the most overall growth compared to the other 28 elementary schools in the district. Given the research questions of this study, Mountainside Elementary came to mind as a case-study site because feedback seemed to already be part of their school culture and they were making steady

gains in student achievement. Digging deeper into a school like Mountainside Elementary, where feedback and growth appeared to be present, provided a richer landscape for the design of this study because the participants could reflect on and analyze feedback differently than in a school where feedback and growth were less evident.

Participants

The school principal and teachers from the same elementary school were invited to participate in this study. The use of multiple participants in varying roles within the same school serves to deepen the understanding of the investigated experience (Polkinghorne, 2005). Prior to the start of the study, teachers selected their level of involvement in the study by choosing whether or not they wanted to participate in the questionnaire, focus group, and/or the interview. Because more teachers volunteered to be interviewed than was needed, a purposive sampling strategy was used to select teachers that represented an ample amount of rich information from which the researcher could learn from the experience (Patton, 2002) and make meaning related to the phenomenon of inquiry (Merriam, 2002). More explicitly, the purposive sampling strategy aimed to include teachers from every grade level and prioritized interviewing teachers who had not participated in the focus groups in order to capture additional viewpoints. Teachers who were new to the school were excluded because they did not have prior experience with the principal.

Recruitment

The principal was invited to participate in the study with a letter and a face-to-face meeting to address questions about the study. I worked with the principal to determine a time to present the study to the faculty to solicit teacher participation. After the initial faculty meeting, I sent the faculty an electronic copy of the consent form and attended an additional faculty meeting to address questions and collect consent forms. The consent forms had the various options for teacher participation listed and participants simply checked the boxes of the activities in which they were willing to participate (see Appendix A). Of the 15 teachers on the faculty eligible to participate, 12 volunteered to participate, and 11 actually participated. Each participant's level of involvement is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Involvement in Data Collection Activities

Participant	Questionnaire	Focus Group	Individual Interview
Cathy	X	X	X
Connie			X
Ellen	X	X	X
Erin	X	X	
Jenna	X	X	
Laura	X	X	
Leigh	X	X	
Marcy	X	X	X
Megan	X	X	
Sara	X	X	X
Susan	X		X
TOTAL	**10**	**9**	**6**

Data Collection Methods

The data collected for this study was triangulated across questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, and document analysis. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods of data collection to corroborate findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam, 2001). The use of multiple sources of data allowed for the phenomenon, in this case feedback, to be examined with multiple measures, which increases the construct validity of case studies (Yin, 2014). Each method for data collection was employed in a sequence beginning with questionnaire administration and the principal interview, following with focus groups, and ending with individual interviews, including a final interview with the principal. Document analyses were conducted throughout the study and were used during the individual interviews. The purpose for the succession of data collection allowed for each data collection phase to inform the next so that adjustments could be made to strengthen the data collection alignment with the research questions (Creswell, 2012).

Questionnaires

The purpose for conducting a questionnaire is to collect information to learn about the distribution of characteristics, attitudes, or beliefs of a specific population (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This study used a questionnaire to collect information related to the nature of the feedback process used with teachers to improve instruction, the influence a principal has in improving instruction through feedback, and a principal's ability to connect a vision for improvement with feedback for improvement. The questionnaire was administered electronically and included response options such as agreement ratings

and multiple choice questions as well as open-ended questions to capture the voice of the participants. In developing the questionnaire, the goal was to provide a consistent data collection experience for all participants by ensuring that the questions fully prepared the participants to answer, were interpreted consistently by every participant, and the type of responses that constitute an appropriate response to the question were communicated clearly (Fowler, 2014). To meet this goal, the questions underwent a critical review by two of my colleagues using Fowler and Cosenza's (2008) checklist for designing effective survey questions as a guide. The checklist is organized into categories that help the researcher determine if the questions being asked: 1) are the right questions, 2) are consistently understood, 3) provide enough information for the respondents to retrieve answers, 4) allow respondents to provide appropriate responses, and 5) are questions that respondents are willing to answer. Each category had criteria to determine the effectiveness of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was developed using Qualtrics, an online survey tool available to university students. Eleven teachers and the principal completed the questionnaire (Appendices B). The principal and teacher questionnaire differed slightly in that teachers were responding to questions about their principal and the principal was responding to questions about teachers. All participants were given 10 days to complete the questionnaire.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are a powerful means to highlight the range of experiences and opinions that shape the reality of a group of individuals (Morgan & Krueger, 1995). The

intent of a focus group is to create a permissible environment where participants feel comfortable self-disclosing without fear of judgment (Krueger & Casey, 2009). For this study, focus groups provided a more complete understanding of the initial data collected from questionnaires. Questionnaires and focus groups are ideal design complements with questionnaires capturing a larger inferential population and focus groups capturing in-depth contextual detail, together leading to an enhanced analysis that bodes more confidence (Wolff, Knodel, & Sittitrai, 1995).

Two focus groups were held at the school in one of the participating teachers' classrooms. The first focus group had six participants and the second had three participants, which falls within the ideal number range for focus group participants (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2006). A semistructured interview protocol with eight open-ended questions was used for both focus groups (Appendix C). Each focus group began by restating the purpose of the study and explaining how the focus group would work. The teachers were very comfortable with each other and in each focus group they asked follow up questions of each other. I used reflective listening to check for understanding and used self-disclosure when appropriate to build trust and demonstrate empathy. The participants seemed relaxed and eager to share. They were very thoughtful in their responses and though there were questions being asked, the dialogue was very conversational, particularly in the first focus group. Several members of the first focus group upon leaving made comments such as, "It felt good to talk about this stuff" or stated, "This was like a great therapy session."

Each focus group was recorded using a computer with an attached omnidirectional microphone. An iPad was used as a backup recorder. The audio files

were then transcribed by a paid transcription service called Quick Transcription Service.

Individual Interviews

The use of in-depth interviews in research focus on the experiences that participants have in the topic of study and its meaning in their lives (Seidman, 2012). According to Patton (2002), there are three types of qualitative interviews: an informal conversational interview that relies on the spontaneous generation of questions during a natural interaction, a general interview guide approach that outlines topics to explore rather than predetermined questions, and a standardized open-ended interview that involves using a standard set of predetermined questions. The standardized open-ended interview was used for this study in order to reduce bias from the researcher (Patton, 2002); however, the interview questions were constructed with a "thematic and dynamic dimension: thematically with regard to its relevance for the research theme, and dynamically with regard to the interpersonal relationship in the interview" (Kvale, 1996, p. 129). In this case, the overarching theme for the interview was directly related to the idea of feedback for improving instruction as outlined within the research questions. The dynamic component of constructing interview questions to further investigate the research questions involved translating research questions into informal language in order to generate spontaneous and rich descriptions of the interviewees' experiences and beliefs through a natural, positive dialogue (Kvale, 1996). Early analysis of the questionnaire and review of the focus group interviews assisted in the development of the individual interview questions.

For this study, eight in-depth interviews were conducted. The principal from the

school was interviewed twice—once at the beginning of the study and then again at the end of the study (Appendix D). A teacher from nearly every grade level was interviewed as well (Appendix D). There were nine teachers who volunteered for the individual interviews and six were invited to participate. Four of the teachers interviewed had also participated in the focus groups.

Interviews were conducted at the school for the convenience of the participants. The teachers preferred to be interviewed during the school day and arranged for the school's instructional coach to substitute in their classrooms while they participated in the interviews. The interviews with the teachers ranged from 30 to 56 minutes. Seidman (2012) suggests that an appropriate length for an interview gives the participant plenty of time to share their experience without being rushed and conversely not giving so much time that the participant is wondering when the interview might come to an end. Each interview was recorded and transcribed by a transcription service in the same manner as the focus groups.

Document Analysis

To corroborate and augment the evidence gathered from questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews, a document analysis was conducted (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Yin, 2014). Documents were collected across several meetings with the principal. Together we reviewed binders containing observation data that the principal used to organize all of the observations conducted over the previous 2 years. We reviewed minutes from building leadership team meetings, faculty meetings, and school community council meetings. The principal also shared artifacts used over the previous

few years to recognize teachers for their efforts in the classroom. Additionally, the principal shared teachers' reflection journals. In the reflection journals, teachers were asked to respond to prompts from the principal and the principal had read each reflection and commented. In many of the journals there was a feedback dialogue between the principal and teacher about improving instruction. All documents were scanned, copied, or emailed. The documents selected for analysis were those that provided insight to the research questions and added value to the other data sources (Merriam, 2009).

Data Analysis

Merriam (2009) describes data analysis as a "complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation" (p. 176). It is this process that allows for meaning to be created from the volumes of data collected. For this study, Marshall and Rossman's (2006) seven phases of analysis served as the foundation for the analytic process: 1) data organization, 2) data immersion, 3) data categorization and theme identification, 4) data coding, 5) interpretation, 6) alternative interpretation, and 7) writing.

Data Organization

For case study research, Yin (2014) recommends creating a case study database that includes the data and the researcher's report or field notes about the data. The database for this study was organized electronically. Questionnaire data and transcriptions from focus groups and interviews were saved on a password protected hard

drive and backed up on a secure "cloud" system. Additionally, the questionnaire data were saved in its original format in Qualtrics, which can only be accessed with the user's unique login and password. During the interviews and focus groups, I took notes in a field journal. The notes during the interviews were minimal because I found that too much time spent writing interrupted the flow of the interview dialogue. I elected to write my initial thoughts or key ideas to revisit after each focus group and interviews. After the focus groups and interviews were completed and transcribed, I listened to the recordings while reading the transcripts and wrote analytic field memos to capture my thinking process about the data and how I was making initial connections to the study (Charmaz, 1995; Miles, Huberman, & Saldena, 2014). My memos were unfiltered in the sense that I wrote everything that came to mind and asked myself questions about the themes, about my biases, and made connections to previous studies, future studies, and ideas for practice.

Data Immersion

One of the challenges associated with an embedded case study is getting lost in the subunits of the case rather than converging the subunits in an attempt to understand the overall case (Baxter & Jack, 2008). To avoid this, I relied on the theoretical proposition that led to the case study as an analytic strategy (Yin, 2014). The theoretical proposition for this study was the notion that feedback from principals influences teachers' practices. This proposition guided the analysis of the subunits and the case as a whole in order to refine this theory. The amount of data collected in qualitative research is voluminous and requires the researcher to immerse themselves in the data in order to

properly categorize the data (Patton, 2002). Two strategies that I found most helpful in immersing myself in the data that actually led to an evolution of thoughts were first, I downloaded the interviews and focus groups onto my iPod and listened to them while I drove and exercised. This allowed me to keep the voices of my participants in my head and to catch the nuances of their answers in terms of their tone, their pauses, and any changes to their cadence that I would not have been able to pick up through repeated readings of the transcripts. After each listening session, I jotted down new ideas or left myself a voice memo. Second, I kept all of my coded categories on sticky notes attached to a wall in my office so that I could manipulate their connections to each other until the themes and subthemes took shape. Often the listening of the interviews prompted manipulation of the codes.

Data Categorization and Coding

Patterns of responses from questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews were generated by hand using open coding. Open coding is the process of naming or labeling categories during data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Saldena (2013) suggests that open coding occurs in two phases, First Cycle and Second Cycle coding. First Cycle coding is the initial assigning and summary of codes while Second Cycle coding is clustering or grouping of the summarized codes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldena, 2014). During the First Cycle of coding, I relied on descriptive coding and In Vivo coding (Saldena, 2013). I also kept a sticky note visible during the coding process that contained Charmaz's (1995) five basic questions for identifying what is happening in the data visible during the coding process. The five questions were: 1) What is going on? 2) What

are people doing? 3) What is the person saying? 4) What do these actions and statements take for granted? and 5) How do structure and context serve to support, maintain, impede, or change these actions and statements? For the Second Cycle of coding, I used Focused coding, which is an adaptation of Axial coding, that aims to identify the codes used most frequently in order to develop categories that make the most analytic sense (Charmaz, 2006; Saldena, 2013). I used sticky notes on a wall to capture the codes that showed up the most frequently across the interviews and focus groups and manipulated the sticky notes into groups. I recorded the groupings in a Word document and then relabeled the sticky notes according to the emerging categories and subcategories. The goal was not to have an exhaustive list of categories but categories that were internally consistent and meaningful to the participants in the study and that addressed the research questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Interpretation

This phase involved evaluating the qualitative results of the case study to make meaning and determine significance of the findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). According to Yin (2014), high quality analysis is based on four principles: First, every assurance should be made to exhaustively cover research questions by attending to all of the evidence. Second, analysis should address the most significant aspect of the case and be void of distractions that divert attention from the main findings. Third, the researcher's prior, expert knowledge should be included in the case study. And finally, all plausible rival or alternative interpretations should be explored. Using these principles, I began to attach significance to the data, make inferences, and draw conclusions (Patton,

2002). My intent was to let the data tell a story about the feedback process a principal uses with teachers to improve instruction. Once the story emerged, the findings were further analyzed against the literature to determine the extent to which my findings corroborated those in other studies and where my findings added additional elements to previous research.

Alternative Interpretation

The more rival interpretations that are addressed and rejected in the analysis of the case study, the stronger the findings (Yin, 2014). In an effort to seek alternative interpretations, or plausible rival interpretations, I spent time reviewing my findings with four trusted colleagues. We were unable to identify plausible rival interpretations, but rather identified some limitations to the study that are discussed at the end of this chapter.

Writing

Case study research can contribute to extending the knowledge base of the education field and improve practice, but only if the main message of the study is effectively communicated in the final written report (Merriam, 2001). The written findings from this case study are illustrated in a narrative that represent an aggregation of the data collected and what I learned. While the main purpose behind my writing was to communicate directly with my doctoral committee about the findings from this inquiry, I also wanted to write in an accessible manner that would transport any reader into my study in a way that they might see feedback from my eyes as a researcher and then apply their own conclusions to the implications of my findings (Donmoyer, 1990).

Trustworthiness

If there is a desire for results and interpretations to be deemed meaningful, the researcher must evaluate the rigor, quality, and accuracy of data collection and integrated analysis (Creswell, 2012). Though most qualitative research use terms such as credibility, transferability, dependability, legitimation, or objectivity to describe the rigor of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 2008), for case study research, Yin (2014) prefers the common tests of construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability to evaluate the quality of a case study whether qualitative or quantitative in nature. Construct validity in case study research is the extent to which a measure, used correctly, operationalizes the concepts being studied (Yin, 2014). Construct validity was addressed through the use of multiple sources of evidence or triangulation (e.g., questionnaire, focus groups, interviews, document analysis). Internal validity is assessed when the researcher is seeking to establish a causal relationship. Because this study is instrumental and exploratory in nature, internal validity was not assessed. External validity demonstrates the extent to which the case study's findings are generalizable to the theoretical proposition versus the populations or universe (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) refers to this as an analytic generalization with the goal being to expand a theory, in this case the theory that feedback about instruction leads to improvements in instructional practice. Reliability assesses the likelihood of the operations of the study being repeated with similarly drawn conclusions and is typically demonstrated through documentation in the case study database (Yin, 2014).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity involves looking at the dual relationship of the researcher as an instrument in the study by examining researcher biases and the various "selves" that engage in the qualitative research process (Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In other words, bringing self-awareness to the forefront of the research process (Rennie, 2004). At the time of the study, my role in the district was as senior administrator directing all curriculum, instruction, and professional learning for the district's 29 elementary schools. Though I did not directly supervise any of the participants in the study, their day-to-day work was impacted by the decisions I was charged to make. This had advantages and disadvantages to the nature of the study. The advantages were that I had an established, trusting relationship with the principal and we shared a vision for improving instruction. Though my relationship with the individual teachers was not as well developed as my relationship with the principal, the teachers may have been motivated to participate in the study to have the opportunity to provide direct feedback to an administrator who has the authority to influence change at a systemic level.

Given my role in the district, I had access to information about the school and teachers that an outside researcher may not have had. For example, I had access to all student achievement data as well as school improvement plans and progress data and my job responsibilities required that I review these data regularly to optimize the support my department offers to schools. This did not appear to impact the interviews or focus groups because it was not a topic for discussion. I was very mindful during the data collection process to not let what I knew about the school impact my ability to

authentically and objectively learn from the research process.

In addition to my role in the school district and my relationship with the participants of the study, I came to this research with preconceived notions about instruction and leadership. These notions were shaped from more than 15 years of experience in education. My bias was that effective teaching and leadership is more about science than art in that there are specific, evidence-based practices that yield greater results than others (e.g., systematic phonics instruction vs. whole language, leading with vision vs. leading with charisma). My expertise in this area was helpful in asking detailed clarifying questions throughout the focus groups and interviews; however, I had to maintain high levels of self-awareness or presence of mind to avoid asking leading questions or asking questions in an authoritative way that would discourage authentic responses from participants. The semistructured nature of the focus groups and interviews helped in this regard in that most questions were predetermined and asked in a way to avoid personal bias and to situate the dialogue away from the power dynamics that existed with my role. To further distance myself from my role in the district during the research process, I avoided looking the part of the district administrator. I did not wear formal business attire such as a suit and high heels but rather I dressed casually and similar to the teachers. I also put my ID badge away since it looks different than the teachers' ID badges.

My interest in this topic stemmed from what I have learned from the research about the critical role teachers play in improving student achievement. As an administrator, my focus has always been situated in improving instruction and this focus is woven into everything that I do. My experience and review of the literature suggested

that teachers do not receive enough feedback about instruction and that many do not use the feedback that they are given to make instructional adjustments. There is a reason for this and I designed this study to begin to uncover why. Recognizing that my desire to find answers may have effected the data collection and analysis process, I controlled for this bias by drafting the questions prior to data collection with the support of my committee. As previously mentioned, I also sought feedback from four trusted colleagues during the analysis and interpretation phases so that identified themes could be challenged and alternative perspectives could be explored.

Ethical and Political Considerations

Ethics

Prior to beginning the study, a comprehensive proposal of the study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Utah and the school district in which the study took place. Additionally, the code of ethics regarding informed consent, deception, privacy and confidentially, and accuracy were adhered to (Christians, 2008; Punch, 1994). Participants completed an IRB approved consent form (see Appendix A). All participants were volunteers and had the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time. Every precaution necessary was employed to assure confidentiality and privacy of the participants in the study. Specific precautions included protecting the confidentiality of the district and school selected as well as the individual participants by using pseudonyms or generic descriptors (e.g., Principal, Coach, Teacher) in the final report. Also, teachers participating in the focus groups were asked to sign a confidentiality waiver that asked the participants to keep confidential the information

shared by colleagues during the focus groups.

Politics

The very nature of public schooling is political as school districts are governed by a local school board, directed by a state education agency, and funded with local and federal tax dollars. The macro politics related to this study included the relentless pressure applied to educators to perform at higher levels in order to increase student outcomes comparable with high performing students in other countries. The micro politics of this study related more to the idea of influence and power. As a senior level administrator in the school district, I was conscientious during all phases of the study to reiterate verbally and in writing that the data collected would remain confidential and that data collected would not result in any job action or retribution nor would it put a participant's job security at-risk. I reminded the participants several times that I did not have the authority to terminate employment of principals or teachers in the school district. To help participants view me in a researcher role rather than an administrative role, during each interaction, I restated my role as researcher, the purpose for the interaction, and that questions not related to the research could be addressed in a different setting. My role in the district did not appear to prevent teachers from answering honestly.

It is important to note that during the time that this study was conducted, the school district was redesigning its teacher evaluation process to comply with a new state law and state board of education rule requiring educators to be evaluated against student growth, high quality teaching and learning, and stakeholder input. The law required

sanctions for ineffective teachers and incentives for highly effective teachers. The district's current teacher evaluation system had been in place for nearly 20 years and for most teachers was the only evaluation system they had known. There was much angst around a new system, particularly because there were still a number of unknowns that the state legislature and state department of education had not decided on or provided direction around. For example, how student growth would be measured in nontested grades and subjects and what specific sanctions and incentives would be put into place had yet to be determined. This political situation was important because feedback about instruction typically occurs after instruction is observed, informally or formally as in a teacher evaluation. The findings from this study will be useful in supporting principals with more effective methods for giving feedback within the new evaluation system. Additionally, the researcher was heavily involved in the development of the new evaluation system and the findings from the study will influence the design and implementation process of the new evaluation system, and more specifically, training.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The focus of this case study has been to explore the process that principals use to provide feedback to teachers in order to influence their instructional practice. As described in Chapter 3, a questionnaire, focus groups, interviews, document analysis, and field memos were used to explore the nature of the feedback process used by a principal to improve instruction, the influence a principal has in improving instruction through feedback, and a principal's ability to connect feedback for improvement with a vision for improvement. Each data collection method was guided by four research questions:

1. What type of feedback does a principal provide to teachers about instructional practice?
2. What processes does a principal use to provide instructional feedback to teachers?
3. How is the feedback process for improving teachers' practices related to a principal's ability to set clear improvement goals?
4. In what ways are teacher practices influenced by the feedback for improving instruction provided by a principal?

Using the research questions as domains, protocol questions were developed to investigate the context (school) in which the case study (principal) was situated in order to learn more about the phenomenon of using feedback as a learning construct for improving instruction. The focus groups, interviews, and document analysis yielded the

richest data in identifying themes, while the questionnaire served as a compliment to the voice of the participants.

This chapter will report findings that emerged from the data in four domains: Nature of Feedback, Process of Feedback, Feedback and Goal Connections, and Influences of Principal Feedback.

Context

Mountainside Elementary School is situated in the center of a midsize, suburban school district. The school serves approximately 375 students in kindergarten through 5th grades. Students are predominantly White (79%) and at least half of the students receive free or reduced lunch. There are 15 classroom teachers ranging in experience from 1 year to 30 years. At the time of the study, the school had been focusing on increasing student engagement as a strategy to improve outcomes for student performance as outlined in the school's improvement plan. This had been a focus for the school for the previous 3.5 years. Specifically, the school leadership team had decided in the spring of 2012 that they wanted to increase the number of opportunities students have to respond to instruction (OTR), and increase the feedback ratio to at least 4:1 positive to corrective feedback from teacher to student. Both instructional techniques are part of the school district's framework for instruction, known as Evidence-Based Instructional Priorities. The district describes an OTR as a "teacher behavior that prompts a student response that provides evidence (saying, writing, doing) of engagement in the learning expectations…Opportunities to respond can be focused on the individual or on a group of students. OTRs can be verbal or non-verbal." With an effect size found to be 0.60

(Hattie, 2009), OTRs are believed by the district to be critical for helping students focus on lesson content, assisting the teacher in checking for understanding, and keeping students active and attentive to learning. Feedback is described in the district literature as "a specific response that informs the learner that the behavior or task is being performed accurately or is in need of improvement." The district literature goes on to cite Hattie's (2012) meta-analysis that reports that feedback from teachers to students has an effect size of 0.75.

The decision to focus on these instructional techniques was the result of the school's leadership team attending a district training that focused on the district's Evidence-Based Instructional Priorities and the corresponding effect size each priority had on improving student achievement. The principal recalled in an interview, "It was interesting that after that meeting, when we came to meet [as a leadership team], we just wanted to do OTRs because we saw that it was such an easy thing to implement and it would have such a huge effect." To accomplish this, the school's leadership team volunteered to pilot an observation tool that included collecting data on the OTRs and feedback observed in each classroom. A district team observed each teacher at Mountainside Elementary and compiled the data into graphs for the leadership team to use as baseline data to begin their improvement strategy. The leadership team used the baseline data to develop a scope and sequence for providing professional development on how to use the instructional techniques and the principal developed an observation protocol specifically for OTRs and feedback. Prior to the school year ending, the leadership team was able to deliver a brief training on OTRs and feedback to their colleagues and then the principal observed each teacher twice to see how teachers were

incorporating what they learned about OTRs and feedback in their classrooms.

Each fall since the initial training, Mountainside Elementary teachers set goals for the rate of OTRs they wanted to achieve and their desired ratio of feedback. Throughout the year, the instructional coach and/or the building leadership team provided professional development on the various types of OTRs that teachers can incorporate into their lessons and strategies for providing appropriate feedback to increase student learning. Progress towards OTR and feedback goals was monitored by direct observation using specific observation protocols. The principal aimed to observe each teacher monthly, as did the instructional coach. Additionally, teachers conducted peer observations twice each year. A review of the observation data showed that, during the previous 2 years, each teacher was observed an average of 17 times. A veteran teacher who had only been at the school for a year prior to the interview stated, "I've never been at a school where the principal [and coach] are in your rooms as much as they are [here]. Which in some ways is a good thing, because you know it's going to happen. It's less intimidating having them in all the time than it is the one and only time [for formal evaluation]."

Voices

As mentioned in the previous chapter, one principal and 11 teachers from Mountainside Elementary School participated in the study. The participating teachers represented 73% of the total number of classroom teachers. Detailed below is information about the principal and teachers who participated and their engagement with the study. This information provides background about the participants that is important

to the context of the study because it adds depth to the voices of each participant.

Principal

Kelly Rose, the principal at Mountainside Elementary, had been an educator for 30 years. She began her career as an elementary teacher and taught 6th grade for 8 years. At the prompting of her father to obtain a Master's degree, Kelly inquired about Master's degree options with her teacher friends and because her close friend decided to apply for an administration program, Kelly followed. Kelly admits that if her friend had been planning to get her Master's degree in reading that she probably would have chosen reading as well. During her administration coursework, she began to realize the impact she could have as a principal and upon completion of her Master's degree, she began applying for principal positions. In her 22 years as an administrator, Kelly has worked at four schools and, at the onset of this study, she was entering her 8th year as the principal at Mountainside Elementary School.

Throughout her career, Kelly has always put students first. This core belief of advocating for students has remained strong and intact as she has grown as a leader and even shifted aspects of her practice. Her teachers feel that everything she does is "based on a desire of goodness for the kids." They feel that this desire is at the center of how Kelly leads. During a focus group, one teacher commented, "Everything she does, everything she tells us to do, every decision she makes, she has the best interests of the kids in mind and heart." Another teacher agreed saying, "She totally is helping kids. Every decision is made with [kids] in mind." Beyond just supporting the teachers and leading the school to be student centered, the focus group gave examples of how Kelly

works directly with students. One example given was about working with students who exhibit challenging behavior. A teacher described Kelly's process:

> She has taken kids one by one and helped them recognize their naughtiness and helped them figure out what they can do to not be naughty. Then she brings them back to class so they're not missing out on instruction…They're the kids that need [instruction] the most and so I love that she's doing this because they're only out for like 15 minutes or so and they're not missing a lot.

Kelly's commitment to students was further illustrated by her response to one of my initial interview questions. I asked Kelly about the purpose of giving teachers feedback about instructional practice. She replied, "Well, the end goal is that I want my kids to do better, but to do that, I have to have my teachers do better. So it's to help improve their teaching so they can affect my kids."

Teachers

Eleven teachers participated in this study. Ten participating teachers completed the questionnaire, nine teachers participated in the focus groups, and six teachers engaged in individual interviews. Table 2 outlines characteristics of the participating teachers and the level at which they were involved. The teachers' experience at Mountainside Elementary School ranged from 3 to 30 years. Five of the 11 teachers had solely taught at Mountainside Elementary during their teaching career. Of the six who had taught elsewhere, only three had spent more than 2 years teaching in another school.

Table 2

Teacher Participant Characteristics

Teacher	Grade Taught	Years Mountainside	Total Years Experience	Participation Level
Cathy	1st	2	30	Questionnaire Focus Group Interview
Connie	K	20	20	Interview
Ellen	1st	4	14	Questionnaire Focus Group Interview
Erin	5th	6	6	Questionnaire Focus Group
Jenna	4th	17	19	Questionnaire Focus Group
Laura	2nd	6	6	Questionnaire Focus Group
Leigh	K	10	10	Questionnaire Focus Group
Marcy	4th	20	21	Questionnaire Focus Group Interview
Megan	3rd	18	19	Questionnaire Focus Group
Sara	3rd	3	3	Questionnaire Focus Group Interview
Susan	5th	6	17	Questionnaire Interview

Feedback Domains

Nature of Feedback

The nature of feedback refers to the type of feedback given during the learning process. Analysis of focus groups and teacher interviews suggest that feedback from a principal is most meaningful when it is specific, doable, and individually balanced.

Specific. Teachers in both focus groups talked about the importance of feedback being specific so that they know exactly what they were doing well or exactly what to do differently. As one teacher put it, "If someone can find something specific with what I'm

doing and tell me that [I] need to do more of it, or [I] need to do less, or none at all; because if it's something specific [I] can just focus on, I think that that's the most effective." The teachers at Mountainside Elementary felt that most of the feedback they received from Kelly was specific, particularly when the feedback was in writing; however, a few teachers gave examples of times when they wanted more specific feedback. Sara shared during her interview that she had asked Kelly several times "How am I doing?" to which Kelly responded, "Oh, you're doing great." As a new teacher, this lack of specificity was worrisome to Sara and she finally asked Kelly, "How do you know that I'm doing great?" Kelly replied that she never had parents complain about Sara's class or that if Sara were doing badly, she would let her know. While this was not exactly the response Sara was looking for, she acknowledged that she finds corrective feedback more valuable and reflected aloud that she might need to be more specific in soliciting corrective feedback from Kelly. Marcy, who also values corrective feedback more than positive feedback, felt that Kelly rarely gives her anything specific to improve upon, thus she prefers to be observed by strangers so that she can get feedback from an individual with a fresh view of her teaching. Despite Sara and Marcy wanting more specific feedback, they agreed with their peers that giving specific feedback is actually one of Kelly's strengths. Because she is always in their classrooms, the teachers remarked that Kelly has a sense of what they are experiencing in their classrooms, allowing her to provide more specific feedback. As Erin said in the focus group, "Kelly is everywhere."

During my interviews with Kelly, she shared that, during the previous 2 years, she made an effort to be in classrooms on a more regular basis rather than just during formal

evaluations. I asked her what she thought about giving specific feedback and she said the following:

> I think teachers actually need more specific feedback than the kids do…Because if I come up to Sara and I say, "I really like your lesson. Good job." That's not as effective as if I say, "Sara, I noticed your kids following the management routines really, really well. It went fantastic." I mean, because if I just say "good job," they're not exactly sure what I think is a good job. And maybe that's the same with kids. But see, like, because when I've been doing my observations this year, I have on my observation [form] that I want specific feedback, but can they make feedback more specific? I think if you tell a kid "good job," or "that's great," or "perfect," I think that tells them that it was right. I don't think they have to say "that was right" I don't know...But I think with some things, it helps if it's more specific…especially when it's corrective feedback.

We pondered the idea of how specific is specific enough and whether or not specificity is more important when giving corrective feedback compared to affirmative or positive feedback. In the end we concluded that feedback needs to be specific enough that it explicitly communicates to the receiver what to do more (desired behavior or performance) or less (undesirable behavior or performance) of. Using this definition of specificity, I reviewed the 261 observation protocols used to observe the general education teachers at Mountainside Elementary and found that teachers were given at least one instance of specific feedback in writing on 82% of the observations. Some examples of specific positive feedback included, "I liked how you had students rephrase what other students said. This is a good skill for students to use." "Giving them sentence frames to put vocab into sentences is great scaffolding for speaking." "Great use of technology to provide an understanding of bar graphs!" and "When you reinforce specific behaviors the other students do the same. It's very effective."

Most of the specific examples of corrective feedback seemed to come in the manner of suggestions, such as, "I wonder if while you're reading and comparing stories

you could have each student keep adding to a graphic organizer such as a Venn diagram to solidify the comparisons." "I wonder if you could even pause occasionally to model your thinking and model annotation as you read to build their metacognitive skills." "While they are reading silently, I wonder if you could randomly call on each student in the group to read out loud to you to gauge errors and fluency," and "One suggestion would be to continue to teach/review as supplies are being passed out. This might help students who easily become distracted." These examples stated exactly what was working or what could be tweaked so that the teacher knew whether to continue with or begin incorporating the given strategy.

Occasionally, there were written directives on the observation protocol. For example, "Where were your small groups? One of the most important parts of the day are SBL groups. This should always be a priority," or "Your transitions took too long and need to be shortened." In addition to the specific feedback, the observer often asked questions about the observed instruction. For example, on one observation, Kelly asked the teacher, "Why are your groups all boys or all girls?" On another she asked, "Why didn't you model reading in this lesson?" On the observations that did not provide specific feedback, there was either no written feedback to accompany the data collected on the observation protocol or the feedback was very general such as, "Excellent classroom management," "Great student engagement," and "I like how positive you are with your class."

Specific feedback seemed to be preferred to general feedback because it was seen as meaningful, something that a teacher could "chew on." One of the teachers also made reference to the idea of sincerity or genuineness when giving feedback saying, "You can

tell when people are just, if it's false praise or false criticism." This makes the case for specific feedback being more meaningful because the more specific the feedback is, the more authentic it is. In addition to feedback needing to be specific it must also be realistic or doable.

Doable. Specific feedback also needs to be something that "can be achieved." The theme of doable feedback came up with every teacher during both the focus groups and the individual interviews. In short, teachers conveyed that feedback needs to be doable. Marcy made the suggestion,

> I think the principals should like really think things through before they offer feedback. Because sometimes she says things, I'm just like, are you kidding me? How long has it been since you've been in the classroom? Like she really should think, principals in general, not just Kelly, should think suggestions through before they offer them, maybe. Because we feel a little bit of pressure to follow through what she suggests.

Other teachers agreed that principals in general should think through the feedback given to teachers and whether or not it is realistic amidst everything else they are being asked to do. Throughout the focus groups and interviews, several of the teachers gave specific examples of feedback that Kelly had given them that was practical or just the "tweak" that they needed. For example, Cathy shared in her interview that after an observation, Kelly gave her some feedback about her use of OTRs and told her she was "doing it right" but just needed to do "more." Kelly gave her a specific OTR strategy and Cathy said, "I went right back in and in my very next lesson I tried it, and it worked."

In her individual interview, Marcy followed up her comment from the focus group and said, "[Kelly's] ideas, sometimes, she just doesn't think them through, but to her, it's always what will help the kids." Kelly's focus on students is a trait that Marcy both respects and appreciates in her principal.

In my first interview with Kelly, prior to the teacher focus groups, Kelly shared her belief of feedback needing to be doable. She said:

> I think the biggest key [to giving feedback] is that they think that I care but it also has to be doable. I mean I can't ask them to do something that would make them drown. I have to do it in small bits, and I have to pick and choose so that I don't give them too much. And so that's why we have just been working on feedback and OTRs. If I gave them all the other stuff they would just throw up their hands and say, 'I can't do this all of the time.'

Kelly is also very aware of how long she has been out of the classroom. She thinks this can be a barrier to some teachers accepting her feedback. In our second interview together, she said this about two teachers who she thinks do not respond to her instructional feedback:

> This is my insecurity talking; maybe they don't think that I'm a good teacher. I mean, I haven't been in a classroom for 22 years…I mean, most principals here have been in the classroom recently. I've been out of the classroom a long time. But I don't feel that. I was a good teacher. I was really good. And I think I'd still be really good. In fact, I'd be better because I've learned all of this stuff.

Kelly seemed very confident in her ability to offer doable feedback because of what she has learned about instruction and she is also aware of the importance of feedback being doable.

While the teachers and Kelly agreed that feedback needs to be doable or "realistic," what was seen as doable feedback seemed to depend on the teacher. For example, Marcy told of a time she tried a suggestion from another teacher to use electronic books on the iPads rather than the hard copies so that each student could have his/her own copies and it did not go well. Marcy's assessment was that the suggestion was not practical. She said, "maybe it works better for other people, and maybe the kids could get trained to be faster, or something…but if it isn't right for me, I just ignore it." She contrasted this example with an example of another observer giving her the

suggestion to use popsicle sticks for calling on individual students to respond in class. She really appreciated this feedback because it was "needs-based, simple, and specific." Similarly, Connie told of a time that she received some feedback about her classroom routine for students using the restroom that she disregarded because it was not practical for her kindergarten class. Connie has all of her students use the bathroom during a scheduled break and she was told to change this routine because it took too much time. Her response to the feedback was, "Effectively for my classroom, it is more time efficient than to every few seconds have somebody asking to go potty…I don't like my class being broken up constantly. I like to run, and then break, and then get back on."

Different from specific feedback, doable feedback involves the receiver's perception and, in some cases, I suspect the skill and will of the teacher. For example, on one observation, Kelly noted, "Your objective for the lesson was not posted and I could not tell what the purpose of your lesson was." Posting objectives and connecting to them regularly is an expectation of all teachers in the school district. Yet whether or not this particular teacher found it doable was impossible for me to tell because I did not know the teacher's skill level or attitude about district and school expectations. Maybe she didn't know how to write objectives and needed support, or maybe she forgot to post them that day, or maybe she finds the idea of posting objectives to be a pointless task and refuses to conform. During the analysis, I reflected on doability in a memo:

> This idea of doable feedback seems like a no brainer but in picking it apart, it is actually more complex than just being achievable because teachers begin in different places. What is doable for an experienced teacher could be overwhelming to a first-year teacher or vice versa. Thus, when giving a teacher feedback, particularly when it relates to an expectation, or as Kelly calls them—nonnegotiables, a principal must assess why the teacher isn't performing in the first place. Is it skill or will? Can't do, or won't do? The answer to these questions can help a principal determine the amount of support and guidance the

> teacher needs to achieve at the level expected. Kelly seems to understand this side of doable because the teachers referenced a number of times that Kelly suggested the teachers work with the instructional coach to help them implement specific techniques or to have the coach model if they didn't understand how to do something. I got the impression that every teacher who participated in the study had worked regularly with the coach. There seems to be a link between support and doability. The aspect of doability that seems to piss teachers off is not so much the feedback that relates to the expectations but when a suggestion for improvement is made that is not viewed as practical because it doesn't fit the context, is too costly in terms of time and resources, is not sustainable, or is simply viewed as something that will not work (Field Memo, October 14, 2014).

One of the voices I thought a lot about while writing my memo was Marcy's. She said during her interview:

> I think there are some teachers, me at times, too, I'm sure, that like when you get feedback, you don't know how to improve from it…So you also need like an instructional piece, even as a teacher…How do I implement this? What does this look like? Support me, you know, type of thing…So maybe there could be a couple of people who are getting feedback and maybe don't know how to improve on it…And I think that everybody here works really hard. Everybody here is completely dedicated to the job, dedicated to the kids. So, it's not for lack of trying or lack of desire to improve if somebody's not improving.

I asked teachers during the individual interviews if support was offered in conjunction with feedback and all of the teachers felt that support was continuously offered and easily accessible. Ellen said that during faculty meetings, both Kelly and the instructional coach offered to model lessons or Kelly suggested that the teachers invite the coach to demonstrate a specific technique that had been taught. Susan further validated the accessibility of support saying:

> [Kelly] is an available resource and she does have ideas, you know. I mean, she has been in schools for along time so she has ideas. And she's willing to say, "hey, have you tried this?" And if I say, "I don't have time for that" or "I don't know how to do that," then she'll, you know, pull in another level of support. And sometimes, that support is her doing the whole thing…Like with the students [behavior] contracts, I mean, all I had to do was fill it out at the end of the day. [Kelly] managed the rest of it.

The amount of support offered appears to have contributed to the perception that the feedback offered at Mountainside Elementary is generally doable.

Overall, it appears that Kelly and the teachers are aligned in their belief that feedback about instruction needs to be doable. Support for making feedback doable and thinking about the practicality of a suggestion are also critical factors in teachers' perceptions about doability.

Individually balanced. In each focus group, I asked the teachers about the type of feedback they receive most and if they wanted more or less of a certain type of feedback. They reported that Kelly almost always gives individual teachers both positive and corrective feedback at the same time because most of the feedback is tied to observations and is written on the observation form. They also reported that she gives a lot of positive feedback to the whole staff during faculty and team meetings. One teacher gave an example of a recent statement Kelly made in a meeting, "I am so proud of our school. I'm proud of what we've achieved. And look at where we've come. And look at how everyone works together and there's not a single teacher that I wouldn't want my own child to be with." She even asks teachers to write positive things about each other on a special form that Kelly then reads during meetings. The teachers reported that overall, they receive a lot of positive feedback from Kelly and each other, which contributes to an overall positive atmosphere.

The individual needs of teachers were extremely varied. While each teacher expressed an appreciation and desire for positive feedback, the amount they indicated they need in relation to corrective feedback was all over the place. Cathy just wants to be told "Good job" every now and then without all of the "other stuff." Laura "thrive[s] on

positive reinforcement [Kelly] gives" and wants more than she currently receives because she is sensitive to constructive feedback and is "not always super confident." When she is feeling vulnerable, Laura views "constructive feedback more like negative feedback" and it really gets to her. Erin likes the positive comments but also wants Kelly "to just get to the 'but' part" so that she can focus on improving. Jenna talked about being able to take corrective feedback better if Kelly starts out with positive feedback. Sara said, "I like hearing 'yeah, you did great here,' but I want to know, how can I improve? Where can I improve? That's what drives me." Megan said she wants more positives than corrective and she really wants feedback in writing so that she can refer to it often.

Despite the variance in their personal needs for feedback, all of the teachers agreed that they want a higher ratio of positive feedback to corrective feedback. Cathy said, "I think that we respond with a higher ratio of positive to negative. You can always find things people are doing good. Always." Yet the more we talked about what the ideal ratio of positive to corrective might be, it became clear that the desired ratio was different for each teacher. This concept led me to choose to label this theme, *individually balanced*. Several of the teachers said, "we are just like our students" with regard to needing and responding to feedback. Sara specified:

> It's the same thing when you look at your classroom environment. You know that you're going to have some kids that can take certain types of feedback and thrive, and they can take some criticism and they want to improve themselves because that's who they are. And then you have other kids that you recognize, OK, I've given you criticism and you just completely melt down. And you recognize, I have to change the way that I deal with this. If I want the student to be successful, I need to change. And it's the same thing. Anytime you're in a position of authority or a position of managing people, whether it's a teacher with students or a principal with teachers, we have to recognize that different things are going to work with different people. And it's a matter of feeling that out.

Teachers suggested that principals take the time to get to know each teacher's

personality. Ellen said that she has:

> noticed that there's a certain type of person who can handle any type of feedback—it's like a certain personality type. And some people can use it or they can take criticism with a grain of salt and kind of put it aside, even though it may hurt you. And there's some people who just internalize it and any suggestion they have walls up and it's really hard for them.

They felt strongly that sorting this out is part of one's responsibilities as "the boss." Sara recommended that principals ask teachers what they need with respect to feedback to facilitate open communication about feedback in general.

During the individual interviews, I asked teachers if they have ever been asked what type of feedback they prefer and how they would prefer to receive feedback. The six teachers could not recall being asked. I asked Kelly the same question and she said:

> I thought about doing that but I don't think I ever did…But I don't think that's a bad [idea] because, like, I know me. I would rather get feedback, like personal, like written or verbally or something, rather than like in a principal meeting saying how great things are. I mean, I would kind of die. Does that make sense? I'm more private.

In my final interview with Kelly, I asked her to group her teachers by how well they receive feedback. She started with three categories: 1) teachers who will always try to act upon the feedback they are given, 2) teachers who sometimes act and sometimes do not act upon the feedback they are given, and 3) teachers who rarely act upon the feedback they are given. I asked her to elaborate on the personalities of the teachers in each group and any other differences between the groups. She described the first group as being "more positive" overall and that they are the "ones that thrive on feedback…and they always want to get better." The second group had two teachers who she said, "can be negative sometimes," which Kelly has very little patience for, and the other teachers in the second group are "a little scattered and they lack follow through." She felt that this

group always listens to her feedback, but "they might not necessarily do it." The third group only had two teachers in it and the biggest difference with these teachers compared to the other two groups is that Kelly said these teachers "won't talk to me" about their observations. She said that had she not put a copy of the observation protocols in these teachers' boxes, she would never know that they even received the data because they never "mention it." Whereas the teachers in the other two groups seek Kelly out to process the feedback. I asked Kelly if she gives feedback differently to the teachers in each group and she said she gives feedback the same regardless of how she thinks the teachers will respond. In reviewing the observation protocols, there were not any differences in tone, type of suggestions made, or a variance in the ratio of positive to corrective feedback given.

Although Kelly did not talk specifically about the teachers needing varying ratios of positive to corrective feedback, she seemed to acknowledge the different personalities of teachers and the challenges principals face in leading people. She described this challenge as:

> Sometimes it's pushing. And sometimes it's just letting them come up with it. I mean some teachers come up with it all by themselves, and some teachers you have to kind of guide with some questions. And some teachers you have to be really direct with.

Understanding this balance requires getting to know your staff and, as the teachers suggested, taking time to ask about what teachers need regarding feedback and continually communicating about feedback the purpose and process of feedback so that the giver and receiver are continually growing together. During my interview with Sara, she brought to life these ideas when she shared her reflections that occurred between the focus group and her individual interview:

> I think the questions that you're asking are helping me to think about things in a different way. I have expectations of the feedback that I want. And I would assume that everybody has those expectations and maybe some people want specific and some people don't want any…[I was thinking], I'm not getting exactly what I want, but I wasn't looking at what I *was* getting…I was only listening for what *I* wanted to hear and not hearing everything that was being said…And so, you know, when I watched Kelly, especially in the last two meetings that we've had since we had our focus group, I'm mentally tallying up [the feedback]…I'm paying closer attention, I'm thinking that what she's trying to do is relate to us and give broad feedback to all of us saying, "Hey, this is how I see this or this is what I think." Not necessarily saying, "This is how I feel so you need to feel the same way because it's how I think you need to think the same way." And so, I think that for me…it's helping me to maybe understand the few instances that I've talked with her since. And, again, it's that—okay, am I hearing what I want to hear or am I actually listening to what she's saying?

Feedback Process

The feedback process domain encompasses the mode in which the feedback is communicated and the timeliness of the communication. Details about the feedback process came from the individual interviews, the questionnaire, and analyses of observation protocols and reflection journals.

Formal and informal feedback. Kelly described her process for giving feedback as both formal and informal. She described formal as "more routine" and informal as the feedback that she gives "on the fly." For the previous 2 years, Kelly had organized her formal feedback around the school's goal to increase OTRs and feedback. She used an observation protocol that included a frequency tally for OTRs and feedback and a space to record written feedback about what was observed. A review of the observation protocols from the previous 2 years showed that the majority of the feedback written on the observation protocols directly related to the teacher's use of OTRs and feedback, but occasionally Kelly included written feedback about the teacher's management or use of

the curriculum. Kelly reported that teachers often want to know immediately what she noticed during her observation and so when teachers seek her out, she verbally tells them what she has written on the protocol. After each observation, Kelly provided teachers with a copy of the observation protocol used. She summed up this process as follows:

> First of all I like to do a general [overview] so they know what I am looking for…I like them to know why I'm coming in. I just think it's more fair if they know why I'm coming in. So they have the answers ahead of time. And then I go in and I do the IPOP or I do my evaluation for OTRs and feedback, and then I always write at the bottom feedback and I always try to make sure that my feedback has lots of positives so they feel comfortable with me coming in and then I might throw in a sentence saying, "Have you ever thought about trying this? What about this?" So I don't ever say, "Do this, do that." I'm pretty, "Have you ever tried this? Or do you think this would work?" type of thing.

During individual interviews, I asked teachers to share their experience with this process. They confirmed that Kelly is in their classrooms at least once a month doing what they perceive as a formal observation because she uses a specific observation protocol. They also confirmed that Kelly writes more positive comments than suggestions or corrective feedback. Talking about the feedback on the observations, Ellen said, "I think she's very positive and when she does have some criticisms, she's very blunt and I appreciate that." In the focus group, Erin gave an example that confirmed Kelly's perception of how she gives feedback. She said, "I think that [Kelly's] really good at putting that positive spin on [feedback] to make you understand, 'Okay, I'm not a horrible teacher but I can always improve.' And I think that's important…It's more of constructive criticism instead of just criticism."

In addition to receiving a copy of the observation protocol, teachers received regular summaries of their progress using OTRs and feedback based on Kelly's observations. Kelly also periodically "pops in" to their classrooms informally to connect

with the students by participating in the lesson or asking them about the lesson or saying something silly to make them laugh. Susan stated, "[Kelly] comes from a stance of being very supportive and not adversarial and so [when she observes, it] doesn't ever come off like she's out to get you…[It] just always feels like, hey, be as authentic as you can be and let's just see what you're doing. And I love that she always makes a point to talk about the positive first."

Written feedback. Results from the questionnaire and interview demonstrated that teachers and Kelly agree that handwritten feedback is the mode used most often in comparison to email or verbal feedback. This mode seems to be favored because it is the most efficient and it is tied to a process (described above). Kelly's rationale for providing more written feedback is that she "feel[s] really guilty taking up [teachers'] planning time or their recess time or something." In addition to efficiency, the teachers reported liking that they can revisit written feedback and take time to digest it. Erin said, "I keep [all of my observations] and if I teach a similar lesson, I'll look back at [the feedback]. So the written feedback is nice." Leigh added that it is often a challenge to "internalize everything they say to you so it's good to keep records…and then when you're ready, you can look at pieces and snippets at a time…because for me if I were to try to do everything they said I needed to improve on, it would be overwhelming."

The written feedback that appeared to be revisited often was the dialogue that occurred in the reflection journals. Kelly required teachers to respond to a reflection prompt at least monthly. The prompts generally had three to five questions that provoke thinking about what teachers are learning, practicing, or engaging in as teachers at Mountainside Elementary. For example, one month Kelly asked teachers specific

questions about how they felt about parent/teacher conferences; another month she asked them to reflect on a workshop that the entire faculty had attended; and another month she asked them to describe and reflect on their experience participating in peer observations. At first, the teachers admitted to viewing the reflection journals as "one more thing," but when they saw that Kelly was taking the time to respond to their ideas and answer their questions, the journals became more valuable. The journals provided the teachers with a forum to converse about instruction and solicit feedback from Kelly. From Kelly's perspective, the journals gave her an opportunity to hear more about what the teachers were thinking and feeling about instruction and their personal teaching goals. Megan expressed during a focus group:

> I like having my feedback written. I think more so that I can reflect on it and go back to it and revisit…I like to have a record to save and I save my journal and I look at it…I look at my journey and I look at where I am going now…So I like to go back and reflect upon suggestions and strategies that were suggested that I implemented that were successful and maybe some things that I still need to work on. So for me, I just like having a written record to refer back to.

The reflection journals came up in both focus groups as a safe place to communicate about the feedback they had previously received and about big ideas for furthering the school's vision. Sara described it as, "that's where we can write how we feel, what we need…that's the way we have communicative feedback." By communicative feedback, Sara was referring to communicating about being able to solicit specific feedback.

Pairing observation data. According to the questionnaire, 100% of the Mountainside respondents are more likely to consider feedback about their teaching when the feedback is paired with observation data. Given that the observation data includes feedback that is written, this seems to align with the teachers' preference to have feedback in writing. A response from a teacher on the questionnaire stated, "structured

feedback (based on the formal OTR or IPOP observation) guides my style of instruction. It has to be data that is linked to a practice with a good effect size though, so I feel the data is worthwhile and will lead to improved student outcomes." Another teacher wrote, "When given with observation data, it drives what I do in the classroom both in math and fluency practice. It makes me more competitive with myself and others." The process of pairing observation data with feedback appears to be so routine at Mountainside Elementary that teachers have come to expect every observer to give them data about their instruction and specific feedback. One of the days that I was conducting individual interviews, there was a team of visitors from other districts across the state observing a number of the teachers and I asked one of the teachers how the observation went and she commented that while she thought it went "okay," she said she would not have confirmation about that because they were not using an observation protocol.

Observing teachers at least monthly as Kelly did allowed for teachers to receive feedback in a timely manner. This was important to several of the teachers. In the questionnaire, one teacher wrote, "Timely feedback from the principal is influential to my teaching practice because it provides opportunities to learn and increase my productivity." Susan felt that timeliness plays an important role in giving feedback. During our interview together, she said, "[Kelly's] always really timely about giving feedback and so when she'll give us our little written summary, it's usually the same day or the next day and so it's still fresh in my mind. That's super helpful because otherwise, I barely even can remember what I was doing."

This corroborates findings from the interviews suggesting that Kelly's established process for providing instructional feedback is proving to be effective in that teachers are

accepting the feedback and in many cases acting upon the feedback. The process that Kelly has in place for giving feedback also seems to incorporate the aspects of feedback that teachers feel are critical: specific, doable, and individually balanced feedback. Further, this process enabled Kelly to give feedback in a written format, which teachers prefer.

Goal Setting and Feedback

A leader's ability to set a clear vision and goals is critical to improving student outcomes (Robinson, 2011). For this reason, I wanted to investigate how Kelly sets goals for improvement, translates the goals into expectations for teachers, communicates these expectations with teachers, and provides feedback to teachers related to the goals. I was also interested in how teachers viewed the role of goals in their teaching. At Mountainside Elementary, the building leadership team is involved in writing the state required school improvement plan. The district requires schools to set a student performance goal and a learning goal for teachers. Mountainside Elementary's student performance goal is to improve achievement by 10% in reading and math. The learning goal for teachers is to increase OTRs and feedback. For the previous 2 years, Kelly asked teachers to set an individual goal related to the number of OTRs teachers would like to consistently achieve in an hour and their desired feedback ratio. She facilitated their individual goal setting by sharing with the teachers the research about OTRs and feedback and the average number of OTRs she had seen in their classrooms. Kelly included their individual goal in the periodic observation summaries that she gave to teachers so that they can see their progress.

In addition to the performance and learning goals, Kelly also had what she called "nonnegotiables." The nonnegotiables included: implementing the district-adopted language arts and math curricula with fidelity, following the district-created curriculum maps, using specific intervention protocols, meeting student achievement progress-monitoring expectations, and meeting professional learning community expectations. Kelly included the above-stated student performance goal on the top of every meeting agenda, although she did not necessarily restate the goal and she indicated that she was not convinced that anyone read it. She emphasized the nonnegotiables and the learning goals more when giving feedback, especially if she had to give corrective feedback. She said, "If [my teachers] don't do a nonnegotiable, I kind of get mad." At that point she would provide a supervisory directive. She said, "If I say this is the way it is, then that's the way it is. And if you don't like that, I'll help you find another job someplace else." Though she had not had to say that to a teacher yet, she felt strongly about enforcing the nonnegotiables because they were in place to support students.

When asked if teachers know the school's performance and learning goals, Kelly replied, "They would tell you to increase OTRs and the positive feedback ratio." Inquiring further, I asked Kelly how setting a vision and communicating goals impacts her ability to offer feedback and she responded:

> I think they need to know what you expect and what your vision is and what the whole vision for the school is. I mean everybody here wants kids to be safe and they want them to learn. I mean there isn't anybody you talk to that feels any different than that. I think they need to know what you're focusing on and concentrating on so they know how. Teachers in general are people pleasers and so they want to please too. There's not one teacher that doesn't want to do well.

Getting into classrooms to observe how teachers were implementing OTRs and feedback was critical to monitoring the progress of the school's goals and the teachers' individual

goals. This required Kelly to set a goal for herself to get into each teacher's classroom at least monthly. She said, "I didn't want to do a half-assed job, I wanted to do a good job so I made a goal higher [than what was recommended by district administrators] because I wanted to get in all my teachers' rooms more often." She made her goal public and set a schedule and according to the responses from teachers on the questionnaire, she has met her goal to be in each teacher's classroom each month.

During the interviews, I asked teachers to identify the school's goals and only two of the six teachers were able to state the student performance goal. These two teachers were on the building leadership team. One teacher stated the district vision as the school's student performance goal, another teacher stated Kelly's nonnegotiables and one teacher admitted to not knowing adding, "I must be doing them or someone would tell me." Over the course of the interviews, however, each participant did reference the school's focus on increasing OTRs and feedback. In the questionnaire, the 10 participating teachers were asked to rank their level of agreement with statements related to the school's goals. Figure 2 illustrates the teachers' level of agreement.

Teachers also were asked whether or not Kelly informs them if they are meeting expectations and all but one teacher agreed or strongly agreed. Teachers were asked if feedback that is linked to the school's goals is helpful and whether or not feedback that is tied to school goals impacts their actions in the classroom. All of the teachers reported that most of the feedback they receive from Kelly is related to improving OTRs and feedback given to students. During the focus group, Jenna stated:

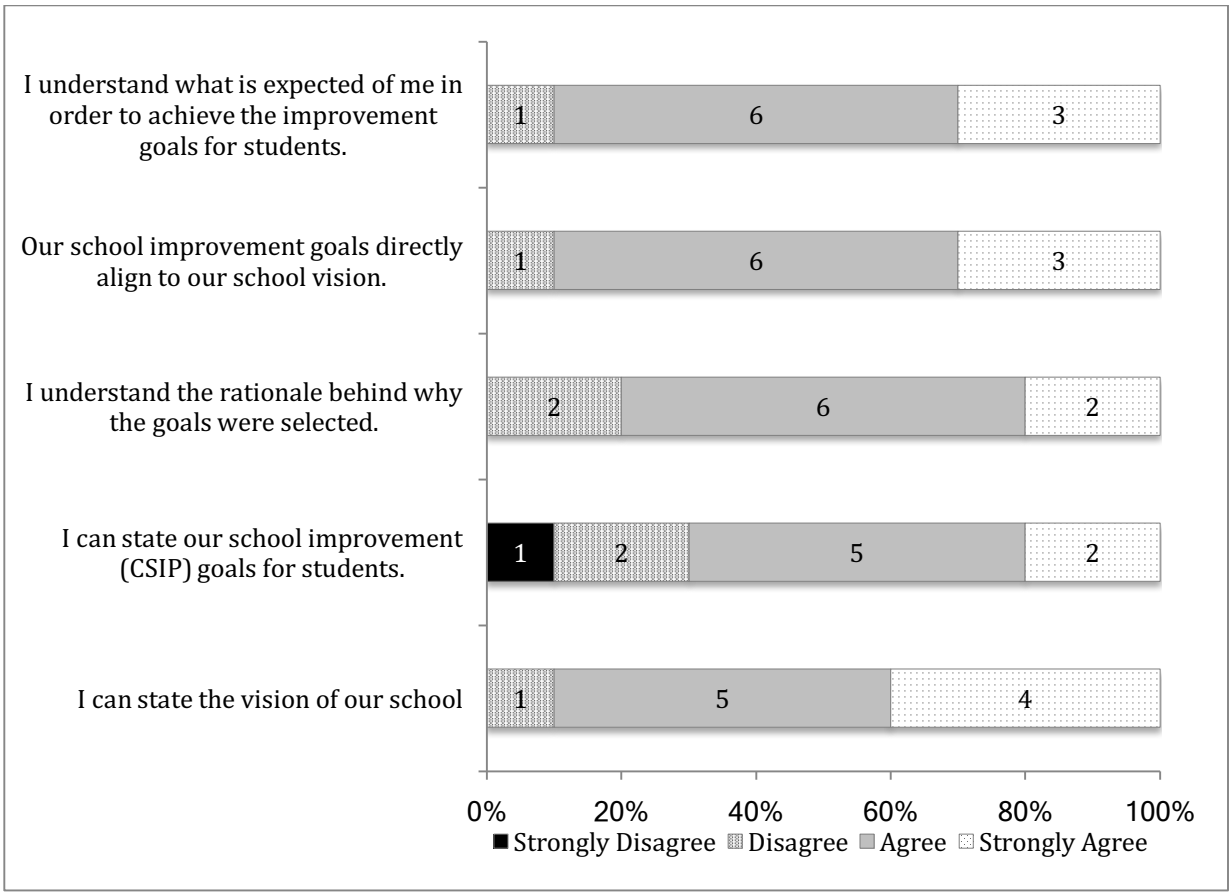

Figure 2. This figure demonstrates teachers' level of agreement to statements about school goals at Mountainside Elementary.

> Kelly has a really good vision and sets high expectations. And she sets out a plan of how we can reach these goals. And the feedback is tied right into that. I think our school is very goal driven and I think we have a high level of respect for each other, and we're pretty confident too, so that brings a real strength for the whole faculty. But the goal and the vision and the consistent feedback and coming into our classrooms related to that goal, I think it's kind of lifted us all.

While the teachers said that it was important to receive feedback about goals because "that is what is going to get us there," feedback tied directly to the goals did not impact whether or not these six teachers acted upon the feedback. Connie said, "feedback is feedback…[and it is all] very valuable." Cathy said she values feedback, but added,

"When it's all just related to a school goal and there's no personal touch, I have a tendency maybe to shy away from it…it's just sometimes nice [to be] acknowledged for how hard you're working." Susan's perspective was that while feedback about goal attainment is important to measure and communicate progress, "there [are] parts of the art of teaching that you can't just measure" and teachers need to hear that feedback too. For example, "so and so's mom came in and said that you were really sweet with them about their dog dying. You know, you can't measure that."

Although the discussion about aligning feedback to the school goals and the importance of school goals did not come up explicitly except when asked, it was obvious that school goals are driving what is happening at the school. Teachers talked about common structures and processes such as the observations, professional development, coaching, professional learning communities, etc. that have been put in place to support them and their students, but they did not talk about these structures in relation to the school improvement plan. The structures and processes were discussed more in terms of "this is just how we do things at Mountainside."

Kelly deliberately put the process of observing teachers and giving them feedback based on observation data in place to meet the learning goals that she set for her teachers in hopes that it would improve student outcomes. I asked her to reflect on the results of connecting feedback to specific goals and she said. "I think I've gotten better at giving feedback. I'm more comfortable. And I get way excited when I see us doing better. And from when I got here to now, it's a totally different school. My teachers are teaching." I asked her what she attributed to the change and her response was:

> I think it was the OTRs. Because they got engaged. Even Marcy, who was a really good teacher beforehand, she's so much better now because she makes a

> conscious effort to engage her students throughout the whole lesson. I have less teacher talk than I used to. And I think that's a good thing. I think me giving feedback has strengthened my relationship with my teachers too…I think it's because it makes it more of a team effort to improve the whole school. And so it kind of creates a bond. I know that this school, it's not just because of me…A lot has to do with everybody. It's not just me…All my teachers have improved. I can't say one that hasn't.

Kelly's reflection about her experience setting clear targets highlights the collective learning that can occur. Her experience also demonstrates the galvanizing power of goal setting to strengthen the working relationships within a school faculty and the impact that those relationships have on results.

Influence of Feedback on Teacher Practice

As stated in Chapter 3, one of the reasons that Mountainside Elementary was selected was because of the perception that the faculty seems very open to feedback about how to improve. In exploring how principal feedback has influenced the teachers' practices at Mountainside Elementary, three themes emerged: relationships, instructional expertise, and culture.

Relationships. During my first interview with Kelly, I asked her to describe the characteristics of effective feedback. What she chose to share was less about the characteristics of feedback and more about philosophy. Without hesitation, she said:

> I think the most important [thing about feedback] is that [the teachers] need to know that I actually care about them and want them to do better. Because if they think that I'm just telling them something and I really don't care if they succeed, I don't think they will value it.

The notion of caring came up repeatedly throughout the interviews with teachers, the focus groups, and in both interviews with Kelly. The principal and the teachers at Mountainside all seemed to identify caring as the cornerstone of building positive

relationships that enable feedback to influence practice. Caring about her staff is something that Kelly does intentionally. She shared with me a story about a class she took about leadership that captures the motivation behind why she focuses so much effort on caring for her teachers:

> I was taking a class called Principal Thinking. And the question we had to do some paper on was, "Who was most important—the teachers, the parents or the students? And why?" And my answer was that the students are the most important, but I'm going to let my teachers think it's them because they're the ones that take care of my kids. And that's how I kind of lead. I try to take care of my teachers so I can take care of my kids.

Kelly demonstrates care for her teachers by offering support, conveying value, and nurturing friendships.

All of the teachers expressed feeling very supported by Kelly professionally and personally. Professionally, they indicated that they feel that Kelly provides them with opportunities and resources to learn new skills and implement them in their classrooms, even if this means purchasing additional materials, supplies, and/or furniture. More than half of the teachers described Kelly as a "problem solver." Megan elaborated:

> I feel like Kelly is in the trenches with us. She is our leader and she is very, very good at that, but she is also in the trenches with us, so, she has created that camaraderie between the whole faculty and staff…I feel like we work together, definitely, even though she is my leader. We would work together to problem solve. She is very good at that, if there is something, a suggestion that she has given you to try and it didn't work out, she will rethink it with you. She will take that time with you and that's really valuable to me too; the many times that we sat down and we did that.

Susan further illustrated this idea of Kelly being in the trenches with teachers stating:

> You can do a lot when you have rapport with people…it's feeling like she's right in there with us. You know, when I used to teach core academy, I talked about the kids kind of being in the mud with these big, sticky problems. And you know, my job as the teacher was to be there in the mud with them. And that's kind of what the principal's job is—to be there in the mud with us and help us get through

> it. It's not to stand outside of the mud and, you know, direct us. It's getting right in there, and [saying], "you know maybe we should all try going this way."

In Kelly's words, she said, "I just figure we're all in this together. And if I can help them, I will, and if they can help me, they will. I mean, I've had teachers come and say, 'well, what can I do to help?' And stuff like that." She said she thinks that her teachers know that she will help them and that she would "do anything for them."

The "doing anything" for her teachers came through in how teachers talked about the personal support they feel they get from Kelly. For example, Marcy said during the focus group, "I know [Kelly's] absolutely got my back. And she's done things for me that she didn't have to do as a principal to support me. To support me with my family, whatever she could do." She reiterated those feelings of support during her interview stating, "Kelly completely supports me as a person, and, you know, as a mom and even as a teacher, but just that she supports me makes it a happy place for me to come every day." Ellen got teary-eyed talking about the personal support she has felt from Kelly over the years. She expressed:

> I feel very lucky and I feel grateful to Kelly because she hired me…When I first started working, it was a bad year and everything fell apart. My husband left his job and my son who was 14 years old was going through depression and Kelly was so amazing. You know, she just cared about our family. She hired my husband to do tiles. She made me take days off because of my son. She was just amazing.

The support teachers received from Kelly appears to have been sustained over time, and it is one of the reasons the teachers felt she cares so much. Sara says plainly, "I feel that I couldn't ask for a better supervisor, a better boss…I think that Kelly is very supportive of her people. She cares about us tremendously."

The idea of value, or professional worth and respect also came up in focus groups and interviews. In addition to general support, teachers said that Kelly values their expertise and experience by asking them what they think. She relied on the building leadership team and her coach to ensure that as a school, they were on track and moving towards achieving their goals. Kelly asked teachers often how "things are going." Whether it is asking the entire staff during a faculty meeting, asking building leadership team members to solicit input from their grade level teams, or asking teachers to respond to prompts in their reflection journals, Kelly continually seeks to learn how decisions were impacting teachers and students so that she could make the best decisions for her school. During the focus group, Erin indicated, "[Kelly] may not always agree with our suggestion, but she will respect you and she will problem solve with you. So if it's a direction that she's not willing to go, she'll let you know that, but she'll also tell you why." Susan used the following example to explain how Kelly values teachers:

> [Kelly] always says how much she values us. I mean, she makes a point of saying it. And because Kelly just tends to sort of say the first thing that comes to her mind, you know that if she's saying it, it's probably really genuine and from the heart… One of the differences is just even the kind of things we talk about in faculty meetings—we talk about big ideas. We don't talk about nitty-gritty.

The "big ideas" Susan referred to were thinking creatively about solving the challenges in schools as opposed to using faculty meetings to remind people to get to work on time or to have their lesson plans on their desk before they leave each day, and so forth. This staff seemed to be able to talk about big ideas because not only did they feel that Kelly valued them but also because they valued each other due to the opportunities they have had to collaborate and observe each other that have built a real sense of what is happening in each other's classrooms. During the focus group, Megan talked about the

impact peer observations have had on her practice and the faculty.

> I learned so much more [from peer observations] than just sitting in a professional development ad maybe taking a few bits and pieces back but not necessarily seeing it in action. So I think that was powerful for us to see that. And I think that's what built our safety in [being observed] because we were observing each other first.

In the other focus group one teacher said:

> [Kelly] unified the school to make us as whole school work together and have some consistent patterns in our classrooms. I think that influences us all because we're trying to be consistent, we're trying to help prepare the kids as they move on, to already have a pattern.

Another teacher added, "[Kelly's] goal is to be transparent. She wants us to be at the point where we are comfortable with each other and that we're transparent and we're there to help build as a school, lifting ourselves up completely." On the questionnaire, teachers reported seeking feedback from their colleagues at least weekly. Feeling valued by the principal and peers seems to give teachers collective ownership of the school's goals and overall success and contributes to what Leigh calls "an atmosphere of care."

When the teachers talked about the caring relationships that Kelly has built, it was not uncommon to hear the teachers refer to Kelly as their friend. Ellen said, "I honestly feel like Kelly's my friend. I really do feel that way. So I want her to be happy with what I'm doing in my classroom. Just like I would want any of my friends." Erin reflected that her relationship with Kelly keeps her honest and she often asks herself, "Would I do this if Kelly was in my room right now?" She said she asks herself this question because she really wants to make Kelly proud, "She's my friend, but I still respect her as my boss or my leader, you know?" Marcy similarly described her desire to please Kelly, saying, "I always want to be right up at that [high instructional] level, so that if she walked in she would be happy. She's the boss, I want to please her."

One of the reasons the teachers may feel that Kelly is their friend is because of the level at which she engages them personally. During one of the focus groups, the teachers shared that Kelly hosts pool parties during the summer and the staff gets together nearly every month for dinner or another event outside of school. Jenna described it as an opportunity to "sit down at dinner and kind of put everything else aside, and just talk, and enjoy each other's company, and we never feel intimidated in those settings that Kelly is our principal. We can all let down our hair and just visit and talk and share." Kelly shared that she has "let down more shields at this school" than any of her other schools. She attributes this to how much she has developed as a principal compared to her past experiences, "Sometimes you only see the principal as the person who turns the reports in on time and deals with the naughty kids. And I think [my current staff] see me, hopefully, as more than that." Overall, she said she feels closer to this staff and speculated that it could be due to hiring all but two of the teachers during her tenure at Mountainside Elementary.

While her friendships with the teachers seemed genuine, she does not seem to let the friendship overshadow her student-centered leadership philosophy. As stated earlier, Kelly believes strongly that teachers need to know that the leader cares. When I asked her more about caring for her staff, she explained it like this:

> I think about feedback for me personally and I do a lot better with feedback when I think they care about me and they talk and discuss with me instead of write me up and tell me I goofed. I mean I already know I goofed. I mean if you came to me and said, "I really think that you should this because you're not doing very well and I want it done." That would be different than you coming in and saying "I want you to give it a try because I think it will help bring up your scores and let's chat about it next month." Maybe just the words [are different] because you're actually saying the same thing but I feel that you care about me more. I think in general teachers want feedback, but I do think that it needs to be done carefully so that you don't hurt their self-esteem or your relationship. But maybe

> I'm too nice and maybe I care too much about the relationship. I don't know. It's just me.

This statement exemplifies why the teachers feel that Kelly cares about them as friends and desire to please her or make her proud.

While each interview and focus group kept cycling back to the importance of relationships, I knew from my document analysis that increases in achievement had occurred only during the previous 3 years. Further, the teachers and Kelly had stated that it had only been the last few years that feedback to teachers had really increased. This evidence suggested that relationships alone do not lead to improved teaching and increased student achievement, so I dug deeper with Kelly during our second interview. I shared with her my perception that relationships appear to have always been a strength of hers and I asked her what the difference was between how she led 6 or 7 years ago compared to the previous 3 years. Kelly had this to say:

> I just know more what to do. No one ever really taught you how to be a principal. You just go to these [principal] meetings and they tell you to do things and you go back and do them. But this is the first time [I've been part of a district that has] ever concentrated on instruction. I mean, we were always supposed to be the instructional leader, but nobody ever really told us some of the things that would help you be the instructional leader. And maybe everybody else just knew and I was dumb, I didn't figure it all out. But I mean, like the observations, being in classrooms…but it was combining the observations with data too. And we really, our whole staff, in fact Marcy was probably the one that said first when she said, "I really like this stuff because it actually tells you what you can to do get better." And I don't think teachers have been told what to do to get better.

Along with the results from the document analysis, this statement highlights that, in addition to relationships, a principal must have instructional knowledge or expertise in order to give specific enough feedback about instruction if they want to influence teachers' instructional practice.

Instructional expertise. Kelly feels that instructional expertise does make a difference as to whether teachers respond to feedback or not. During our first interview, she stated, "I think my credibility comes into it. It's whether or not they believe me or not or if they think that I'm out to lunch. If they think that I know what I'm talking about they are going to be more apt to try something than if they think it's stupid." Kelly attributed her ability to identify effective instruction to the opportunity she has had as a part of a new school district that focuses on common, evidence-based instructional practices. She said she has learned more about the type of instruction that makes a difference with students and she feels that district administrators support principals in leading instruction. Between 2009 and 2014, Kelly participated in over 400 hours of district-sponsored professional development. This has been a combination of bi-monthly principal professional development that focused on instructional leadership, effective instruction, and school improvement; building leadership team training that focused on instruction and data-based decision making within a Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS); and content-specific workshops focused on reading instruction, math instruction, positive behavior supports, and so forth. All of the district-sponsored training for principals and teachers connects to the district's Academic Framework for Instruction. According to Kelly, this has made it easier to give feedback because she has confidence when she has to give feedback to teachers about the identified instructional priorities. In addition, she commented that she appreciates the consistency with which the district focuses on instruction and gave the example that if someone from "the district" observed her teachers or if her teachers asked a specific question about instruction, the teachers

would receive similar feedback or answers to questions that Kelly or the coach likely had given.

When it comes to doing what "the district says" about instruction, Kelly described herself as a rule follower. She feels that much of the success that her school has experienced is because "I will follow the rules. And not all principals follow the rules." I asked her if she believes in what she is doing or if she is just following rules. She said:

> Well, it's a combination of both. I have seen amazing results in our building because we as a school have implemented what you and the [Evidence-Based Learning] Department have shown us that works. This is probably the first time that given a new…direction that you have actually showed us the research behind it and said that it works. I mean when we implemented balanced literacy they didn't talk much about research at all. I know there was some research on it, but they didn't really tell us about it. But that's one thing the BLT trainings have done, is give us some background. I mean I can't believe you bought us the Hattie book because principals never even looked at stuff like that. At least I didn't. And now to be able to have that book and to be able to look something up…I actually have used that book a lot.

The book that Kelly referred to is a book written by John Hattie titled *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*. The district used this book to teach principals and teachers about evidence-based practices that have the most impact on student achievement.

Teachers at Mountainside Elementary indicated that whoever is giving feedback should have some level of expertise about instruction. Sara specified, "If I have that, you know, belief that this person has the knowledge and they're successful, then, I'm going to do it." Sara and others expressed that Kelly is very knowledgeable about effective instructional practices; that "she knows her stuff." For this reason, they said they find the majority of her suggestions to be very helpful in improving their instruction. Megan implied that Kelly's knowledge about instruction has really propelled her leadership, and

thus her following. "She's very aware of research-based practices that are effective and she goes for it. She has tenacity. She will go for it and that is where she's headed, and we're on board with her…I want to share that vision with her; I invest in that with her."

In addition to knowledge of effective instructional practices, the teachers seemed to link the instructional expertise of their administrator to knowledge of the instruction that is occurring in the school. For example, Erin said:

> [Kelly] holds us to [high instructional] standards. She is very aware of what is happening in our classrooms. And she is very aware of how we teach and what we teach because at the end of the day, all she wants is success for the students. That's all she wants. And I think for me, that helps remind me [and] changes the way I teach.

Marcy expressed similar thoughts, but directly connected the influence that observations can have on teaching, stating, "I think that she observes us, influences us. Because I've had principals before that very rarely came into my classroom. Or if they did, it was not for an observation. So that she comes in for observations, influences my teaching." Half of the teachers also contrasted their former principal's perceived lack of knowledge about instruction and presence with Kelly's expertise and visibility. One teacher spoke of her own student teaching experience:

> I was there everyday for an entire year and I never saw [the principal]. He was always in his office, he never participated in anything…Honestly, if he would have come in, I would have been scared. I would have been like, why is he here? Because he never comes in… He didn't really know what was going on. He couldn't relate to us and with Kelly, she can relate to us because she's there. She's in the room, she's in every PLC meeting…even if we're getting dumped on, she's there to kind of help us through it.

Also worth noting about instructional expertise—the teachers indicated that Kelly does not have all of the answers. What they appreciate is that she is very honest when she does not know or understand something and commits to learning or finding someone

who can help. The teachers who have been with Kelly the longest spoke about how much she has "evolved" as a leader. Two teachers specifically mentioned how "coachable" they feel Kelly is. Kelly said to me during our interview, "If you would have done this 10 years ago, [the interviews] would have been totally different…I've just grown so much." Kelly appears to have demonstrated to her teachers that she is always learning how to improve her own skills in order to improve the school to better serve students.

Culture. The theme of culture emerged from the many references teachers made to being part of a family at work, feeling part of a community at work, having a team at work, and experiencing a general sense of camaraderie with each other. I chose culture to represent this theme because the teachers seemed to be describing how the members of the organization interact and behave towards each other. Additionally, several teachers used the word culture to explain why the teachers at Mountainside Elementary are open to feedback about improving instruction. The teachers attributed this culture to Kelly and how she has developed relationships with the staff. In my interview with Susan, she shared:

> I have my whole life believed that the principal sets the tone for the building. Absolutely, period, end of discussion. And it's hard to have a principal that can actually have a good balance between playing the side of the teachers, playing the side of the parents, playing the side of the district. And that's a really hard balance to find, but when you find it and you can really value your people, then I think that's how the magic happens.

The "magic" as Susan put it, is the culture that I observed at Mountainside Elementary. The culture became clear to me during individual interviews when I asked each teacher what the best thing was about working at Mountainside Elementary. Below are teachers' responses:

> Marcy: Honestly, it's that I love my colleagues, like I really enjoy the people that I work with. I mean I've always liked the people that I worked with, but we definitely have a family feel now that has not always been here…it kind of started when Kelly came…it's just fun to come to work.
> Ellen: It's a happy place, and I'm allowed to be really creative and supported.
> Sara: There are so many things. I just love the community feel of the school itself. I mean, just the way that everybody works together, that's huge.
> Connie: I think it's just there's a lot of teachers who are really involved and really want to do their best. And, generally speaking, I think we're all, you know, respectful of one another and we help each other. And I think it's just a good atmosphere to work in.
> Cathy: The positive attitude of everyone. Everyone at Mountainside tries to uplift each other [and] looks for things in the other teacher that they can follow, they that can try to be like and people help each other here. I just love the fact that everyone is willing to help everyone, on the faculty and staff. It is not like that everywhere.
> Susan: I think it's the community of teachers…everybody works hard. Everybody values everybody.

I pressed the teachers to find out more about how this culture came to be. Since Kelly had hired the majority of the teachers I interviewed, I was curious to hear Sara and Marcy's perspective on culture. These individuals had been at Mountainside Elementary under other principals and offered a different perspective. Sara had a unique perspective because she was a volunteer, substitute, and teacher's assistant before she was hired as a teacher. She said the "culture was different 'Pre-Kelly.' It was cliquey. People were just showing up for the paycheck, dissatisfied with what they were doing—Kelly changed that." Marcy offered this insight, "I think that some teachers who were less willing to change have left. Kelly was kind of like, 'well this is the direction we're going,' and teachers saw that and were like, 'oh, we don't like that.'" Cathy is new to the faculty and while she did not know what Mountainside Elementary was like before Kelly became principal, she came to Mountainside Elementary explicitly because she liked the direction Kelly was going and wanted to be a part of a positive culture. Reflecting on her past experience, Cathy shared:

> That's the other thing about this school that I think is different and unique, is there's a feeling that we're all in this together, and don't sweat it because we're all doing the same thing. And other schools I've been at, there's a feeling of, 'well, I'm not going to even try it. I've done this for all my life and it's worked for me, I'm not going to even try it.' And there's lots of pockets of that throughout a school, but I don't feel that here.

Susan's thoughts corroborated Cathy's. During her interview, Susan stated:

> We lean on each other. We have each other. We really do. I don't know of any other school that can rally the way we do. I thought about going to the middle school, because, really, I would love to just teach math all day…I would be so happy. That would be like my best-case scenario. But I can't bring myself to leave Mountainside…I want to be somewhere where I love what I do and I love the people that I work with. And that, you can't get everywhere.

The familial culture of Mountainside Elementary was depicted in nearly every interview and focus group. Several teachers even used the word, *love* to communicate how close they are as a faculty. Yet, what made Mountainside Elementary appear more like a family was not the love and respect that they conveyed about each other, it was the acceptance and forgiveness that they offered to each other, especially toward Kelly, for being "human." This was made clear when the teachers shared less positive experiences that they have had with Kelly. Eight of the 11 teachers who participated in the focus groups and interviews shared a negative experience that they had with Kelly. These experiences ranged from being hurt or embarrassed because of sarcasm or a harsh tone that Kelly used, to feeling singled out and picked on. During the focus group, one teacher said, "Kelly sometimes singles certain people out, like 'don't get on her bad side or your life is going to be hell.' Because there are certain teachers that she has singled out that she's kind of mean to in front of the entire faculty."

Other teachers described Kelly as being unprofessional at times, saying things that were meant to be private or making jokes about individuals. The teachers recalled:

> [Kelly] will call [teachers] out, I mean, I don't know, just kind of jokey, kind of in an off-handed way, but it's very unprofessional. And you know which teachers she's singled out and it's just, I mean…those teachers have come to me and said, "I feel like she's attacking me" and "it's always me she's beating up on." And it was true. She is, she still does…She'll find things that maybe the teacher is weak at and it's kind of like, just kind of light hearted, and as a joke, but you know how people are with sarcasm. It's truth in jest. And it hurts. And we all know our own inadequacies, I mean, we know what our weaknesses are, but when she calls that out amongst all of us, it's very uncomfortable and hurtful, and very unprofessional. So it happens, and that is an example of negative feedback that would not be effective. I think it undermines the faculty.

In the same focus group, the teachers said that Kelly has an angry side that comes out if "[teachers] push back towards something that she believes strongly in."

Several teachers described Kelly as being very "blunt" and "direct" and that they have learned not to take it personally. Cathy described it like this, "Well, it's going back to family. Even in our families, sometimes we get a little sharp with our kids. But they still know we love them. And I think that that's how Kelly is. I think she genuinely loves all of us. But sometimes she is sharp with us." Laura confirmed, "sometimes she plays favorites. And she gets emotional and can be harsh sometimes…But I think when it comes down to it, we all know that she really does care about us." Jenna compared Kelly's behavior towards teachers similarly to how teachers sometimes treat students:

> Well, you know, there are moments when she snaps, but we all do. Even with our own students, you know. We get emotional…But you know, we're all human. We do things we wish we wouldn't have sometimes. But I think her heart is definitely in our corner, for sure. And we feel that, we know that.

I asked the teachers if they had ever given Kelly feedback about these behaviors and they said:

> Sometimes we get so caught up in having an employer/employee relationship, a boss and, you know, there's that little bit of fear of, 'Ok, I know she really can't fire me unless I do something really bad and naughty,' but she can still make my time here uncomfortable so I'm going to do what I need to do to protect myself. And I think we need to move away from that type of an environment where

> there's a little bit of fear of talking to our supervisors. It really should be a give and take relationship if we want to make this the best working place that we can have. How can we communicate together and give mutual feedback to one another?

As the teachers continued to reflect on this question, they did offer some examples of when they had given Kelly feedback and she had listened. They seemed to come to consensus that, "she'll at least listen, even if she doesn't agree." The reason this interaction seemed so familial is because even when the teachers were sharing their negative interactions with Kelly, they were not sharing the examples in a way that suggested that they had any malice towards Kelly or that they were holding grudges and within minutes, the focus group had moved on to talking about Kelly's vision and how "cohesive" and "unified" the school is. They continued to make references to being a family and offering empathy for Kelly because she is "under a lot of pressure" as a principal.

As I continued to press during the focus groups and individual interviews, I asked some iteration of the question, "What is it about this school that has created this open culture?" to which nearly every teacher responded, "It's Kelly." Kelly has built relationships with the teachers that have resulted in a familial culture complete with love and pain that most family members experience. They continue to invest in each other, learning more about each other, accepting each other for what they bring to the table—not what they lack, forgiving each other when they mess up, and in between all of that, they have a lot of fun.

Conclusions

Analyses of these results suggest that in order for feedback to be actionable, it must be specific, doable, and have an individually defined ratio of more positive feedback than corrective feedback. Written feedback that is paired with data is the most desirable and while feedback tied to school goals is important and makes the most sense to teachers, it does not necessarily impact whether or not teachers act upon feedback. The factor that most influenced teachers to act upon feedback that they received was the relationship they had with the principal. In other words, if the teachers felt supported, valued, and befriended by their principal, the principal had more influence on teachers' instructional practice. Another factor of influence was the level of instructional expertise that the principal possessed. The combination of the relationship and instructional expertise themes that emerged in this study resulted in a culture in which the teachers enjoyed coming to work because they felt that they were part of a family. As family members, they were open to ideas from each other and the head of the family (principal). They were also accepting of each other's shortcomings and forgiving of mistakes. The implications of these findings will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study has aimed to clarify the nature of the feedback process used with teachers to improve instruction through feedback, a principal's ability to connect a vision for improvement with feedback for improvement, and the influence a principal has in improving instruction. The need for clarification of this sort comes from the desire to decrease the variance in teacher quality by increasing teachers' skills and performance. In short, this study aimed to shed light on what makes feedback actionable by defining the key ingredients of feedback that make a teacher more likely to act upon that feedback thereby increasing his/her teaching skills.

Exploring feedback in this regard was unique because to date, there have been a limited number of studies conducted on feedback given to teachers and whether or not the feedback influences teacher practice. Feedback is often an aside in the literature about teacher learning and instructional leadership and not referred to as an explicit component of professional development to improve teacher performance or as an integral part of communicating as a leader. This study's investigation of how a principal gives feedback to teachers is distinct from previous studies because it showcases the teachers' perspectives about feedback from the principal as well as the principal's point of view, allowing for a comparison in the analysis.

Findings from this study suggest that actionable feedback is specific, doable, and individually balanced. Individually balanced refers to the ratio of positive to corrective feedback that each teacher needs in order to improve. Additionally, teachers preferred written feedback to verbal or e-mail and they were more likely to act upon written feedback that was paired with student achievement or observation data. While feedback tied to school goals was important to teachers, findings implied that this type of feedback does not necessarily impact whether or not teachers act upon feedback. The factor that most influenced teachers to act upon feedback was the relationship that they had with their principal. Specifically, if the teachers felt supported, valued, and viewed their principal as a friend, the principal had more influence on the teachers' instructional practice. Another factor of influence was the level of instructional expertise that the principal possessed. The combination of the relationship and instructional expertise themes that emerged in this study resulted in a culture in which the teachers enjoyed coming to work because they felt that they were part of a family. The family culture was demonstrated in how the teachers and principals responded to each other's ideas, accepted each other's shortcomings, and forgave each other when mistakes were made. This chapter will discuss how these findings contribute to what is known about the influence principals have on teachers, how they compare to current literature, and the implications the findings have for practice, policy and research.

The Key to Actionable Feedback

In Chapter 2, I described feedback as the process of receiving information about aspects of one's performance in order to influence the transfer or maintenance of skills

and behaviors (Arco, 1991; Balcazar et al., 1985; Fleming & Sulzer-Azaroff, 1989) with the goal of reducing the discrepancy between a learner's current understanding and performance and desired understanding and performance (Hattie, 2009). Feedback is fundamental to learning thus I argued it is also fundamental to leading the learning of others. Extending the literature discussed in Chapter 2 beyond feedback for learning and leading learning, these findings contribute in two important areas: the instructional leadership knowing-doing gap and the conditions necessary for feedback to be actionable.

Instructional Leadership: Closing the Knowing-Doing Gap

In one of my interviews with Kelly, she remembered being told that principals should be instructional leaders, but admitted that until recently, she did not really know how to "do it." Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) refer to this concept as the "knowing-doing gap." They explain the knowing-doing gap as the challenge leaders face in turning knowledge about how to improve into action that results in improvement (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). Findings from this study suggest that the principal closed the knowing-doing gap by first developing her own instructional expertise, and second putting a plan in place to systematically monitor teachers' instructional growth.

Developing Instructional Expertise

Throughout the study, the principal mentioned several times that had I conducted this study 5 or 10 years prior, the results would have been drastically different because she had learned so much about leadership and instruction. An admitted rule follower, Kelly was quick to follow the path outlined by the new school district's vision without

protest. However, as she implemented various strategies for improvement, she evolved from doing what she was told to taking ownership of the strategies that were yielding results in her building. She deepened her understanding of specific strategies by seeking feedback and resources from the district, including professional development, and by analyzing her implementation efforts. She was able to analyze the implementation of her school improvement efforts by observing classroom instruction directly and found it extremely satisfying to watch her teachers improve over time. Kelly admitted that having the opportunity to observe so frequently contributed to her understanding of effective instruction because she could see the various ways a single strategy could be employed across settings and what works and what does not. Teachers reported that Kelly's frequent observations meant that she got to know the unique teaching styles of each teacher and really knew what was going on in each classroom with regards to curriculum, student behavior, and classroom events or special projects. This not only contributed to Kelly's instructional expertise, but it increased her credibility when she gave feedback. Teachers contrasted Kelly's routine observations and knowing what was going in their classrooms to practices of former principals who only observed during formal evaluations every few years.

Kelly was not ashamed to ask questions to ensure that she understood the specifics about an instructional practice nor did she shy away from admitting when something did not work as smoothly as she envisioned. In these instances, she sought advice on how to make corrections. Teachers respected that Kelly was open about what she did and did not know and throughout the study, they commented on her growth over the previous 5 years in instructional knowledge and leadership. It seemed that her

willingness to accept that she did not have all of the answers actually allowed her to further hone her expertise about instruction because she was seeking the perception of others and checking her own assumptions as she problem solved. Leithwood and Steinbach (1995) consider these skills to be a means to collaborative solutions and are part of expert problem solving by principals.

Developing expertise in instruction also helped Kelly to increase her feedback skills. She commented in the interviews that she is more comfortable with giving feedback because she knows what she is looking for and how to make specific suggestions that are doable. As previously mentioned, specific and doable feedback are critical elements for making feedback actionable.

Monitoring Instructional Growth

Simultaneous to Kelly refining her instructional expertise, she organized a plan of action for improvement by setting clear student performance goals and learning goals for the teachers. Robinson (2011) suggests that when setting goals for learning, principals must consider the commitment of the teachers and their current capacity for achieving the goals. To account for this, Kelly collaborated with her leadership team to set targets and arranged for on-going professional development. Kelly expressed the importance of teachers needing to know exactly what is expected of them and why.

Kelly observed teachers frequently to monitor teachers' progress towards the learning goals and offered feedback about where they could go next to continue to improve using a specific observation protocol. This systematic process of monitoring instruction was critical to the teachers' growth. A review of the observation data

summaries showed that each teacher improved in the target area. Teachers liked being able to track their progress and gave more credence to written feedback that was paired with observation data. Further, a review of student achievement data also suggested that students increased their achievement in both reading and math. While the gains in both student and teacher performance corroborate findings from previous literature that setting a clear direction for improvement is a critical leadership practice (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Goldring & Pasternak, 1994; Hallinger & Heck, 1998), they also highlight the important leadership skill of promoting teachers' professional growth by prioritizing the study of teaching and learning (Blasé & Blasé, 2000; Robinson, 2011). Effective instructional leaders employ strategies such as making suggestions, giving feedback, modeling, soliciting advice, and giving praise (Blasé & Blasé, 2000). Extending this research, this study denotes the importance of providing individually balanced feedback in terms of making suggestions and giving praise and attention to the skill of the teacher in making feedback doable. These elements of feedback increase the likelihood of teachers acting upon feedback to improve their instructional practice.

The process Kelly put in place to observe teachers on a regular basis followed by specific feedback and measureable instructional targets provided teachers with answers to questions critical for their learning: Where am I going? Where am I now? Where to next? (adapted from Hattie, 2009). The focus on professional growth in this manner held teachers accountable to the school's goals in a way that was respectful, professional, and encouraging. According to the teachers, Kelly's monitoring was not viewed as an "out to get you," but rather as an authentic check in. Because Kelly was in teachers' classrooms so often, teachers admitted to giving up the idea of doing a "dog and pony

show" and just teaching to the best of their abilities and anxiously awaiting for both their pats on the back and an instructional tweak that could make them even better.

Because the teachers knew what was expected of them, and knew that their principal was going to consistently monitor their instruction and provide corrective and positive feedback, they held themselves accountable to improve. This structure of accountability was likely successful because of the human infrastructure that Kelly built in order to create conditions necessary for feedback to be considered by teachers.

Feedback Conditions: The Human Infrastructure

Findings from this study highlight the conditions necessary for feedback to be given and received. The conditions necessary include the investment in relationships, reciprocity, and layers of supports. Together, these conditions represent an infrastructure of the human side of school improvement and school leadership.

Investing In Relationships

The principal in this study placed teachers as the center of her leadership because she viewed this as paramount to impacting students. In doing so, she focused her attention on building relationships with the teachers, "taking care" of the teachers in terms of resource allocation and support, and focusing on improving their instructional practices. Kelly understood that no matter how deep her instructional knowledge may be, her impact would be limited if trusting relationships were not built (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). According to the results of this study, the principal's relationship with teachers was a key component to a principal's influence on teacher practice. The

teachers cited that the relationship they had with the principal outweighed any other attribute of feedback and increased the likelihood that they would implement the feedback offered.

As stated in Chapter 4, teachers said that caring was the cornerstone of building positive relationships that enable feedback to influence practice. Caring was further categorized as offering support, conveying value, and nurturing friendships. These findings mirror the findings in other studies (see Leithwood, 1994; Robinson, 2010) that suggest that a school leader's success largely depends on his/her ability to integrate relationship values such as respect and openness to solving the complex problems associated with leading for improvement. Teachers in this study repeatedly remarked how much they feel that as a whole staff, including the principal, they are all "in this together" and they consider Kelly to be in the trenches with them. As a result, there is a shared responsibility for improving student achievement.

Other research in this area suggests that school leaders often solve problems through social processes making interpersonal relationships a critical skill for leaders. Bryk and Schneider (2002) found that the levels of relational trust impact student achievement outcomes—most explicitly, the teachers' trust of their principal, the leadership practices that build trust, and the principal's impact on teacher attitudes and school. The relational trust observed in this case study led to a culture of openness in which the teachers felt that they were part of a family that included the principal. The theme of a familial culture in a school with high relational trust between teachers and the principal is not surprising given that leadership is based on followers accepting positional authority and influence occurs when there is agreement in values and reasonableness of

the use of authority (Fay, 1987). Thus, in addition to the teachers feeling that they were "in this together," they also had the desire to make their principal proud of their teaching and to be recognized for their contributions to the school's goals. This was paramount because the staff at Mountainside Elementary acknowledged that every teacher and the principal had a part to play in meeting the school's goals and they had confidence in each other to do their part. I heard multiple times from the teachers and the principal how "good" the teachers are or how "dedicated" they are. This culture, steeped in relational trust, substantiated previous literature that implies that trust leads to greater staff loyalty and an enhanced professional community—or in this case—professional family (Robinson, 2010). Kelly attributes the strong relational trust to the feedback process. She believes that giving feedback has made school improvement more of a team effort and has created a bond between her and the teachers and between the teachers.

Reciprocity

Elmore (2000) suggests that large-scale improvement hinges on a model of distributive leadership principled in the idea that the exercise of authority requires reciprocity of accountability and capacity. In other words, reciprocity means that accountability is multidirectional rather than top down. Similarly, capacity is influencing the skill development of all players involved in school improvement. In this regard, reciprocity extends the idea of each player doing their part to improve student achievement to actively holding each other accountable for learning and performing. Elmore (2000) states, "Reciprocity makes the purpose of getting better at work the common currency of exchange in all relationships" (p. 33). The feedback process

captured in this case study demonstrated the important role feedback has in reciprocity of accountability and capacity. The feedback process had three basic segments: 1) clear goals for improvement, 2) assessment of skills needed to meet the goals, and 3) implementation of a structure for monitoring instructional growth. The teachers and the principal had to learn new skills in order to achieve the school's goals and while the principal, as the leader of the school, had the formal role of holding teachers accountable for making progress, the teachers also held the principal accountable for learning alongside them and leading them through the trenches.

The reciprocity of accountability and capacity at Mountainside Elementary provides a multidimensional perspective of monitoring instructional growth described above because it adds feedback from the teachers to the principal. Sometimes the teachers at Mountainside Elementary were explicit in their feedback to Kelly, other times they gave feedback through their actions. Because Kelly cared about her teachers, she was sensitive to the implicit feedback she was receiving from teachers and reflected often on how to adjust her approach. Reciprocity makes accountability palatable because it creates a structure of accountability that is mutually beneficial—Kelly expected teachers to perform a new skill and created opportunities for the teachers to build their capacity in the target skill while the teachers expected the principal to build her capacity in being able to accurately assess their performance of the skill. Findings from this case study also suggest that reciprocity of accountability and capacity are not possible without relational trust as discussed above and appropriate support structures, discussed below.

Layers of Support

The support structures that the principal in the study had in place for teachers aligned with research that suggests that leaders who are actively involved in coordinating professional learning and coaching of teachers have greater influence on teachers and therefore a more direct impact on student achievement (Robinson et al., 2009; Timperley et al., 2007). Where this study extends the research is in the levels of support available for the principal and the teachers to build teachers' instructional capacity. The layers of support represented in this study are embedded professional development structures that are available to the principal and teachers to access as needed.

Principal supports. Kelly often mentioned how much she has learned being part of a school district with a shared vision for effective instruction. While some principals may have viewed the standardized curriculum, instruction, and assessments as limiting, Kelly has found the standardization supportive because it has provided a common vocabulary for principals to use in talking to each other and leading teachers. Kelly specifically mentioned how she feels the district "has her back" when the road towards improvement gets tough. One of the ways that she feels supported is having access to an external coach from the curriculum department who supports the principal and the building leadership team in implementing the district academic framework and school improvement plan. The external coach is the principal's direct liaison to the curriculum department for questions related to assessment, instruction, curriculum programs, standards, and professional development. Kelly said that having someone who she knows will respond to teachers in a way similar to her because of their shared vision, has helped teachers to realize they are part of a bigger working system.

An additional support that Kelly relies on is her principal colleagues. Principals participate on Leadership Implementation Teams (LIT). These teams are comprised of five principals with a designated team leader. The purpose of a LIT is to provide instructional leaders with an opportunity to participate in a professional learning community focused on discussion of what they want their teachers to know and be able to do related to school improvement. They meet monthly and share successes, discuss barriers to implementation and possible solutions, and evaluate implementation progress. It is during these meetings that Kelly seeks feedback from her colleagues about her improvement efforts. It is also because of these meetings that she knows that not all principals are "following the rules" which she does not fully understand because she believes she has gotten great results by taking the district vision and making it her own. An important feature of the LIT is that the leaders are members of the District Leadership Team that is charged with coordinating efforts for implementation of the district academic framework. These layers of support provide a consistent feedback loop across schools and between the schools and the district which Kelly thinks trickles down to the teachers because it is one more method for keeping everyone on the same page.

Teacher supports. Teachers' layers of support include a full-time instructional coach who is available to observe, model, and consult in the areas needed for teachers to meet their learning goals outlined on the school's improvement plan. Each teacher in the study brought up Mountainside Elementary's coach and the numerous ways they have accessed her expertise. Kelly spearheaded the successful coaching support at Mountainside Elementary by strategically deploying the coach's services. This was based on needs identified or requested through observation feedback and continued until asking

for the coach's support became second nature to the teachers. Teachers also participated in weekly grade-level professional learning communities to problem solve instructional challenges. While professional learning communities were formal, scheduled meetings, the teachers reported collaborating with their grade-level teammates almost daily. An added layer to the professional learning communities included the team leader serving on the school's building leadership team. The purpose of the building leadership team is to develop instructional supports for all students and teachers as outlined in the school's improvement plan. The building leadership team members are responsible for communicating the work of the professional learning community to the building leadership team and vice versus. Kelly relies on her leadership team for most decisions, particularly the decisions that impact teachers. Likewise, teachers feel that the leadership team is where their voices can be heard as part of the decision making process.

In addition to the layers of coaching support for the principal and the teachers, the district provides professional development twice monthly to principals, three times each year to building leadership teams, and there are dozens of targeted workshops for teachers. School-based professional development is led by the principal and the instructional coach and is provided at least monthly. While the coaching and professional development structures seem formal because they involve specific people or meeting times, they work in an integrated fashion to individualize the supports needed by the principal or teachers. Kelly is able to look at the needs of her teachers and layer the support based on the individual skills of the teachers and their individual needs for feedback. Kelly lets the needs of her teachers dictate her needs, in that, depending on the

supports needed by her teachers, she can shift the supports she solicits from her colleagues, her external coach, or the professional development she elects to attend.

Finally, woven into all of the support structures is feedback. The feedback process that Kelly has in place is a support structure in itself because it supports learning, which supports teacher retention. Providing feedback to all teachers, particularly high performing teachers, increases the likelihood that the teachers remain in the teaching profession (The New Teacher Project, 2012). By providing her teachers with feedback to support their development, Kelly is not only increasing teacher effectiveness but is sustaining their impact for the betterment of students in her school.

Limitations of Study

Single case-study research is limited by nature in that the themes and possible theories that emerge cannot be compared as in multicase studies (Yin, 2014). In this particular case, the size of the school may have been a limitation. The school has lower enrollment when compared to other schools in the district and state. Fewer students means fewer teachers which may have been a contributing factor to the principal's ability to build positive relationships that created a culture that is open to feedback. Additionally, with only 15 classroom teachers, the principal's goal of observing each teacher every month and offering feedback on that observation may be more realistic for her than her principal colleagues who have up to 30 classroom teachers.

The teachers who volunteered to participate in the study represented 73% of the general classroom teachers. While the participants make up the majority of the teaching staff at Mountainside Elementary, the four teachers that did not participate may have

offered a different perspective about the process of feedback. Because the teachers made reference to Kelly singling out teachers and Kelly even mentioned that there are a few teachers whom she does not have a relationship with, I wondered if these teachers did not feel comfortable participating in the study knowing that they would be talking about their principal and sharing a perspective that may have been different from their colleagues. These four teachers could have potentially offered a counter perspective that might have enhanced the themes that emerged and offered insight into the implications for practice.

Feedback is considered integral to the learning process (Hattie, 2009) and though the research and protocol questions for this study captured the fundamentals of feedback, strength could have been added with a follow-up focus group that dug a little deeper into how teachers learn through feedback or perhaps some additional interview questions that were more explicit about the learning process rather than focusing only on the feedback process.

Noted throughout the study were the unique structures being implemented in the school district such as a common academic framework; extensive professional development for principals, leadership teams, and teachers; and the allocation of coaching resources. The strength of these structures provided a shared vision and common language for talking about instruction as well as supports for principals and teachers; however, these structures cannot be ruled out as confounding the results.

Likewise, though I took specific precautions to minimize my influence, my role as a district administrator may have impacted the results. I spent so much time at Mountainside Elementary, I felt like I was part of their family. The teachers would see me in the hall or in the office and go out of their way to give me a hug or to say “hello”

or to introduce me to their class. Several of the teachers invited me to observe their instruction, which I declined until the study was complete. During district professional development, the building leadership team would routinely ask for my feedback in solving implementation issues and they freely offered their feedback about district protocols that were not working for them. While this behavior was not necessarily new for the principal or teachers at Mountainside Elementary, it felt different than it had in the past and distinctly different than my interactions with other schools. We were seemingly more invested in what each other had to say during conversations and we asked each other more questions in an effort to seek understanding or to be more thoughtful with our responses.

As a district administrator, it is difficult to build relationships with teachers because as a group, I spend less time with them than I do principals and instructional coaches. It was rejuvenating to be spending so much time in the school and it was a big wakeup call to see the impact it had on the school and on me. We had the opportunity to see each other differently. Given the nature of administrative work, particularly at the district level, the experience at Mountainside Elementary was highly reinforcing. I could not help but think about my own practice as a district leader and the importance of building relationships with schools.

My experience with Mountainside Elementary cemented the theme of relationships being paramount in the feedback process. I would like to believe that the teachers and principal at Mountainside Elementary would have treated any researcher the way they treated me. The reality is that because we will continue to work together, all parties invested more in each other during this process. I do not feel that this investment

altered my lens on identifying themes from the data, but because it challenged my personal assumptions about leadership and gave me a different perspective on teacher's work, the way in which the themes seemed to connect or interact may be unique to my experience or lens.

Implications for Practice

Findings from this study offer important suggestions for practice in public education. I have narrowed the implications to four key areas: 1) principal training, 2) principal movement, 3) time, and 4) teacher training. Each area is thoroughly discussed below.

Principal Training

Given that this study focused on feedback from the principal and how it influences teacher practice, it is not surprising that there is a need to provide principals with training on how to offer feedback that leads to action. According to findings from this study, principals need to understand the individual needs of teachers in order to determine the proper ratio of positive to corrective feedback that the teacher needs for continuous growth. This could be done in individual interviews or a survey. As the principal gets to know the individual needs of the teachers, it will be necessary to check in frequently with the teachers to assess their interpretation of the feedback.

Principals also need to understand how to set clear and achievable student performance goals and accompanying learning goals for the teachers so that they have the capacity to meet the student performance goals (Robinson, 2010). Further, it is not

enough to just set goals, principals need coaching on how to actualize the goals so that they can monitor the progress towards goal achievement and can offer feedback to teachers that is directly related to the goals. The principal in this study focused heavily on the learning goals for teachers. The teachers knew what was expected of them, they were given a lot of support through professional development and coaching to develop the skills necessary to achieve the goal, and their progress was monitored through frequent observations and feedback from the principal. As a result, their skills in the designated areas increased. Because the teachers in the study had been focusing on the same learning goal for several years, the connection to student learning seemed to have dulled in that there was less deliberation in applying the targeted teaching practice for a specific outcome. For example, I got the impression that the teachers believed in increasing Opportunities to Respond (OTR) and the amount of feedback that they gave to students and they knew it was important, but they connected the idea more to meeting the expectations of their principal rather than connecting to their specific lesson and the needs of their students. In this regard, principals need to examine both the instructional observation data and the student achievement data to determine if the instructional strategies are having the desired impact on student outcomes.

Understanding the connection between instructional practices and student achievement requires a level of instructional expertise. As Kelly mentioned during the interviews, she has been out of the classroom for quite some time yet she knows more about instruction now then she did when she was in the classroom. In order for principals to provide specific and doable feedback to teachers, they need to have training in effective teaching practices. Specifically, principals need to know what the practices

look like in action, how to diagnose when teachers are struggling to implement the practice, and how to provide additional support for mastery of the given teaching practice.

Finally, principals need training in how to build positive relationships. Research on educational leadership has outlined *what* factors lead to relational trust (see Robinson, 2010 and Tschannen-Moran, 2009); however, the educational research literature lacks specificity on *how* to build relational trust. Although the educational leadership literature does not offer enough specificity to teach principals how to improve their abilities to build relational trust, research from the field of marriage and family counseling lends itself to operationalizing the behaviors necessary to improve relationship building skills. Most compelling of the research in this field is work done by John Gottman. Gottman (2001) claims that emotional connection is a basic human need and that fundamental to emotional connection is mastering what he calls "the bid." He defines a bid as "a question, a gesture, a look, a touch—any single expression that says, 'I want to feel connected to you.' A response to a bid is just that—a positive or negative answer to somebody's request for emotional connection" (p. 4). Gottman has a step-by-step model for improving emotional communication by focusing on making and receiving bids, which could be a meaningful way to teach principals discrete, observable behaviors that they can employ that will lead to increased relational trust and stronger relationships in general. A key factor in Gottman's model is the understanding of how your own behavior impacts others. This is similar to the research of Argyris (1991) mentioned previously, that leaders and employees need to develop awareness in how their behavior impacts the organization.

Training in these areas mirror the conditions observed in this study that created a culture in which feedback was valued and led to teachers increasing their skills. The teachers' success in improving their own performance and seeing its impact on student achievement also seemed to increase their collective efficacy. Collective efficacy is the shared belief that the faculty as a whole has the capacity to directly affect students' abilities to learn complex content and complete rigorous tasks regardless of students' risk factors (Bandura, 1993; Goddard et al., 2004). Principals must be the first to believe in both teachers and students.

Principal Movement

Research suggests that in order for principals to implement school reform strategies that increase teacher capacity and lead to student improvement, the principal must be in place for at least 5 years (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). The principal's ability to build positive relationships was key to influencing teacher practice in this case study. Building relationships with staff takes time, thus it supports previous research indicating there is a need to keep principals in place for at least 5 years so that they can build credibility in having the instructional expertise to achieve specific goals for students and teachers and to get to know teachers' individual preferences for feedback.

Time

At the end of my first focus group, a teacher remarked, "wow this felt good to get this all out. We should do this more often." This spoke volumes about the fact that educators do not have opportunities to take enough time to process the complex work that

they engage in every hour of every day. Given the findings from this study, time was a challenge for the principal to have follow-up conversations about the feedback given in writing. Time continues to be the commodity that there is never enough of in public education, yet if we do not put structures in place that give teachers time to process, reflect, and inquire further about the feedback that they receive, sustained improvement will be comprised.

Teacher Training

Principals are not the only educators who will need training in order to provide effective feedback. Teachers could also benefit from training to develop awareness of their responses to feedback. Stone and Heen (2014) argue in their book *Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well*, that to be a skillful learner who desires to grow, one must learn how to accurately interpret feedback. Accurately interpreting feedback requires dissection of what the authors call "feedback blockers" that center around the receiver's perception of truth, relationship triggers, and identity (Stone & Heen, 2014). If teachers had the opportunity during pre-service or while in-service to confront how feedback blockers manifest in the workplace, they may be more likely to seek clarification about feedback they have received, advocate for the feedback that they need to meet their own goals, and decrease the discrepancy between their perceptions and reality.

Additionally, investing in collaborative, professional learning structures, such as coaching or professional learning communities, where teachers can plan lessons collaboratively, debrief instruction, and review student learning data provides an

opportunity for feedback and reflection to be embedded throughout the instructional cycle (Wilson & Berne, 1999).

Implications for Policy

At the time of this study, teacher evaluation was a popular strategy for ensuring accountability for school reform efforts. States were implementing policies, many driven by legislation, that hold teachers accountable for student growth and require that teachers demonstrate effective teaching practices. For example, the state in which this study was conducted passed legislation in 2012 that required teachers to be evaluated on three components every year: 1) student growth, 2) quality of instruction, and 3) stakeholder input. Though the legislation in combination with board rules specifies key features of each component, it does not specify the extent to which teachers can expect feedback and support to improve performance. Given the importance of how teachers receive and apply feedback to improve their teaching practices, including feedback requirements and support structures in teacher evaluation policy may leverage the importance of using feedback to support teacher development rather than cast evaluation as a punitive process.

Implications for Research

This study was designed to explore how feedback is used to influence teachers to implement more effective teaching practices for the sake of improving student achievement. Findings from this research have merely scratched the surface on explaining the phenomenon of feedback for learning. Replication studies are needed to

confirm or extend the findings from this research. Additional research that explores the relationship between feedback from principals and teacher performance with student performance is also needed if we are to reduce the disparity of teacher quality in our classrooms. Because the implications for practice identified from this study are significant, studies designed around the effect of specific training for principals and teachers on skill development in giving/receiving feedback and relationship building could help to further operationalize the skills that teachers and principals need to be effective in terms of impacting student outcomes. Finally, because feedback needs seem to be so individually based, designing and testing tools (e.g., surveys) that help a principal tease out the specific differences and suggested actions among teachers could be an entry point for providing individualized feedback to teachers about their instruction.

Conclusions

In a keynote presentation a colleague once said, "Feedback is the breakfast of champions." He used this phrase to illustrate feedback as the foundation for learning. What I have learned researching feedback for adult learners is that while feedback may be the breakfast of champions, each champion eats something different for breakfast. In this study, each teacher brought her own experiences to the table making her needs for feedback highly personal. Despite the individual needs for feedback, the relationship the teachers had with their principal increased the likelihood that the teacher acted upon the feedback given. The strong relationships observed in this study also contributed to a culture at the school that was very open and caring, much like a family. The teachers and the principal reported enjoying coming to work. Given the amount of change that the

teachers have experienced as a result of the formation of a new district, it was remarkable to hear how the teachers leaned on each other and followed the guidance of their leader to forge ahead and keep their focus on student achievement.

This study is a reminder of the critical role that building relationships, mainly trust, plays in leading school improvement. Relationships alone cannot lead to improved results, but it would appear from the findings of this study and previous research that results are not likely if relational trust is not present. During a time in education when so much energy is focused on accountability for results through the use of evidence-based practices, it seems many school and district based administrators have forgotten the impact that relational trust has on an organization and its ability to achieve results. Or rather, accountability and relationships are viewed as either/or. Findings from this study demonstrate that school leaders can have relational trust *and* hold teachers accountable for results—the two are not mutually exclusive. In fact, when a school focuses on improvement from both angles, both teachers and students can flourish. Focusing on both accountability and relational trust may be key to sustaining school improvement efforts.

APPENDIX A

IRB CONSENT FORM

Consent Document

BACKGROUND

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. If there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information, please do not hesitate to ask. Take time to decide whether you want to volunteer to take part in this study.

The purpose of the study *is* to examine the nature of the feedback process used with teachers to improve instruction, the influence a principal has in improving instruction through feedback, and a principal's ability to connect a vision for improvement.

This study is being conducted to meet the requirements of a doctoral dissertation. However, the topic of the study was selected to support the vision and goals of Canyons School District. Results from the study will be taken into consideration in planning professional learning for principals and teachers.

STUDY PROCEDURE

This study will involve your school in four research activities: a document review, an electronic questionnaire, focus groups, and individual interviews. You may volunteer to participate in any or all of the research activities. Not every volunteer will be selected to participate in the individual interview. The questionnaire will be administered to teachers and the principal and will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. The focus groups will be for teachers only and will last approximately 90 minutes. Six individual interviews with teachers and two individual interviews with the principal will be conducted and will take approximately 90 minutes per interview. Questions asked will be about how you experience feedback and about what influences your decision to act upon feedback.

RISKS

There are no perceived risks to participating in this study. Should you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions asked, you may withdraw from the study at any time.

BENEFITS

There are no direct benefits from taking part in this study. However, there is the hope that the information obtained from this study will help develop a greater understanding of how feedback from a principal can support the learning process for teachers in the future.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All research records that identify you will be kept private to the extent allowed by law. Digital files of your response, including audio files and transcriptions, will be kept private using a password protected computer. Hard copies of notes and other records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Only those who work with this study will be allowed to access your information. Those working with the study will include the researcher and the researcher's doctoral committee. Your responses to all phases of the data collection will be linked to your name,

however, your name in the publications will be removed and a generic, Teacher A, Teacher B, etc. will be used.

PERSON TO CONTACT

If you have questions, complaints or if you feel you have been harmed by this research or as a result of participation in this study, please contact the primary researcher, Amber Roderick-Landward, 801-580-3545. You may also contact the primary researcher's advisor, Dr. Andrea Rorrer, University of Utah, Education, Leadership, and Policy Department, andrea.rorrer@utah.edu or Canyons School District's Research and Assessment Director, Hal Sanderson, hal.sanderson@canyonsdistrict.org.

Institutional Review Board: Contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) if you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant. Also, contact the IRB if you have questions, complaints or concerns which you do not feel you can discuss with the investigator. The University of Utah IRB may be reached by phone at (801) 581-3655 or by e-mail at irb@hsc.utah.edu.

Research Participant Advocate: You may also contact the Research Participant Advocate (RPA) by phone at (801) 581-3803 or by email at participant.advocate@hsc.utah.edu.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can choose to participate in any or all of the research activities.

CONSENT

By signing this consent form, I confirm I have read the information in this consent form and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I will be given a signed copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in the following research activities:

- ☐ Document Review
- ☐ Questionnaire
- ☐ Focus Group
- ☐ Individual Interview

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

_____
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

_____ _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRES

Teacher Questionnaire

Dear Participant,
Thank you for volunteering to participate in this questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information about teachers' views of feedback related to instruction. Feedback is defined as any information you have been given about your teaching. Feedback can be positive, a suggestion for improvement, or a directive. In a nutshell, feedback is anything that let's you know how you are doing.

Please read each question carefully and answer openly and truthfully. Your responses will be kept confidential.

Question	Response Option
1. Name	
2. What grade do you teach?	
2. How many years have you been employed as a certified teacher?	
3. How many years have you worked as a teacher in Canyons School District?	
4. How many years have you worked as a teacher in this school?	
FEEDBACK	
5. During the 2013-2014 school year, approximately how many times did your principal given you positive feedback for something you did well in your classroom? Written Note or Card Email Private Verbal Public Verbal	2 or more times each week Weekly 2-3 Times per Month Monthly 4-9 Times a school year Less than 4 times a year I have never received positive feedback from my principal
6. During the 2013-2014 school year, approximately how many times did someone other than your principal give you positive feedback you for something you did well in your classroom? Coach Peer Parent Student Other	2 or more times each week Weekly 2-3 Times per Month Monthly 4-9 Times a school year Less than 4 times a year I have never received positive feedback from my…
7. During the 2013-2014 school year, approximately how many times did your principal give you specific feedback about how you might improve your teaching? Written Note or Card Email Private Verbal Public Verbal	2 or more times each week Weekly 2-3 Times per Month Monthly 4-9 Times a school year Less than 4 times a year I have never received feedback from my principal about how to improve
8. During the 2013-2014 school year, approximately how many times did someone, other than your principal, give you specific feedback about how you might improve your teaching? Coach Peer Parent	2 or more times each week Weekly 2-3 Times per Month Monthly 4-9 Times a school year Less than 4 times a year

Student Other	I have never received positive feedback from…
9. From whom do you prefer to receive feedback about your teaching?	Principal Coach Peer Student Parent No preference Other
10. Why do you prefer receiving feedback from this person as compared to others?	Open ended
11. During the 2013-2014 school year, approximately how many times did you solicit feedback from your principal?	2 or more times each week Weekly 2-3 Times per Month Monthly 4-9 Times a school year Less than 4 times a year I have never solicited feedback from my principal
12. During the 2013-2014 school year, approximately how many times did you solicit feedback from your coach?	2 or more times each week Weekly 2-3 Times per Month Monthly 4-9 Times a school year Less than 4 times a year I have never solicited feedback from my coach
13. During the 2013-2014 school year, approximately how many times did you solicit feedback from a peer?	2 or more times each week Weekly 2-3 Times per Month Monthly 4-9 Times a school year Less than 4 times a year I have never solicited feedback from my peers
14. What types of student data have been used to provide feedback about your instruction? Please select all that apply.	CBM Reading CBM Math CFA Reading CFA Math CRT/SAGE No student data have been used Other
15. How likely are you to consider feedback about your teaching when the feedback is paired with student data?	More likely Less likely It makes no difference
16. What types of observation data have been used to provide feedback about your instruction?	• IPOP • Curriculum Fidelity Checklists • OTR walkthrough • No observation data have

	been used • Other
17. How likely are you to consider feedback about your teaching when the feedback is paired with data from an observation?	More likely Less likely It makes no difference
18. In what ways does feedback from principals influence teacher practice?	Open ended
SCHOOL GOALS ***Rate your level of agreement with the following statements about your school's goals.***	
19. I can state the vision of our school.	Disagree Agree 1 2 3 4 5
20. I can state our school improvement (i.e., CSIP) goals for students.	Disagree Agree 1 2 3 4 5
21. I understand the rationale behind why the goals were selected.	Disagree Agree 1 2 3 4 5
22. Our school improvement goals directly align to our school vision.	Disagree Agree 1 2 3 4 5
23. How often does your principal restate the following to teachers: • School's vision • School's goals • Expectations of teachers	Never Sometimes Often
24. Rate your level of agreement with the following statements about expectations. • My principal informs me if I am meeting expectations. • My principal informs me if I am not meeting expectations.	Disagree Agree 1 2 3 4 5
Please share anything else that comes to mind related to feedback and its impact on you as a teacher.	Open ended

Principal Questionnaire

Dear Participant,
Thank you for volunteering to participate in this questionnaire. The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information about teachers' views of feedback related to instruction. Feedback is defined as any information you have been given about your teaching. Feedback can be positive, a suggestion for improvement, or a directive. In a nutshell, feedback is anything that let's the teacher know how he/she is doing as a teacher.

Please read each question carefully and answer openly and truthfully. Your responses will be kept confidential.

Question	Response Option
1. Name	
2. How many years have you been employed as a principal?	
3. How many years have you worked as a principal in this District?	
4. How many years have you worked as a principal in this school?	
FEEDBACK	
5. During the 2013-2014 school year, how many times did you give [specified teacher] positive feedback about something done well in the classroom? List each teacher Written Note or Card Email Private Verbal Public Verbal	2 or more times each week Weekly 2-3 Times per Month Monthly 4-9 Times a school year Less than 4 times a year I have never received positive feedback from my principal
6. During the 2013-2014 school year, how many times did you give [specified teacher] specific feedback about how to improve her/his teaching? Written Note or Card Email Private Verbal Public Verbal	2 or more times each week Weekly 2-3 Times per Month Monthly 4-9 Times a school year Less than 4 times a year I have never received feedback from my principal about how to improve
7. During the 2013-2014 school year, approximately how many times did [specified teacher] solicit feedback from you?	2 or more times each week Weekly 2-3 Times per Month Monthly 4-9 Times a school year Less than 4 times a year I have never solicited feedback from my principal

8. In general, from whom do you think teachers prefer to receive feedback about their teaching?	Principal Coach Peer Student Parent No preference Other
9. What types of student data have been used to provide feedback to teachers about instruction? Please select all that apply.	CBM Reading CBM Math CFA Reading CFA Math CRT/SAGE No student data have been used Other
10. How likely are teachers to consider feedback about their teaching when the feedback is paired with student data?	More likely Less likely It makes no difference
11. What types of observation data have been used to provide feedback to teachers about instruction?	• IPOP • Curriculum Fidelity Checklists • OTR walkthrough • No observation data have been used • Other
12. How likely are teachers to consider feedback about their teaching when the feedback is paired with data from an observation?	More likely Less likely It makes no difference
SCHOOL GOALS ***Rate your level of agreement with the following statements about your school's goals.***	
13. Teachers in my building can state the vision of our school.	Disagree Agree 1 2 3 4 5
14. Teachers in my building can state our school improvement (i.e., CSIP) goals for students.	Disagree Agree 1 2 3 4 5
15. Teachers understand the rationale behind why the goals were selected.	Disagree Agree 1 2 3 4 5
16. Our school improvement goals directly align to our school vision.	Disagree Agree 1 2 3 4 5
17. Teachers understand what is expected of them in order to achieve the improvement goals for students.	Disagree Agree 1 2 3 4 5
18. How often do you restate the following to teachers? • School's vision • School's goals • Expectations of teachers	Never Sometimes Often
19. Rate your level of agreement with the following statements about expectations. • I inform teachers if they are meeting expectations. • I inform teachers if they are not meeting expectations.	Disagree Agree 1 2 3 4 5
20. In what ways does feedback from principals influence teacher practice?	Open Ended

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Intro: describe the process of the focus group and how the data will be used in the study—data collection, analysis, etc.

The proposed study addresses three major research questions:

1. What type of feedback do principals provide about teacher instructional practice?
2. What processes do principals use to provide instructional feedback to teachers?
3. In what ways does the feedback principals provide to teachers for improving instruction influence teacher practice?
4. How is the feedback process for improving teachers' practices related to the principal's ability to set clear goals?

-General prompts: Could you tell me more about that? Could you give me an example? What do you mean by ...? What did you think about ...?

1. What type of feedback do you receive from your principal?
    - Instructional and pedagogical? Student related? Classroom management? Other?
    - What type of feedback do you receive most?
    - What type of feedback would you like more of?

2. What type of feedback is the most useful? Why?

3. What do you think are the characteristics of effective feedback?

4. How does feedback help you to improve your instruction?

5. How does your principal influence the way you teach?

6. What feedback would you give principals in general about giving feedback?

7. How might a principal improve their ability to give feedback?

8. What conditions must be present within a school culture for feedback about instruction and improvement to be seen as an opportunity for growth?
    - How can those conditions be created?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEWS

Principal Interview #1

Intro: describe the process of the interview and how the interview will be used in the study—data collection, analysis, etc.

The proposed study addresses three major research questions:

1. What type of feedback do principals provide about teacher instructional practice?
2. What processes do principals use to provide instructional feedback to teachers?
3. In what ways does the feedback principals provide to teachers for improving instruction influence teacher practice?
4. How is the feedback process for improving teachers' practices related to the principal's ability to set clear goals?

-General prompts: Could you tell me more about that? Could you give me an example? What do you mean by ...? What did you think about ...?

1. What made you decide to become a principal?

2. What is the purpose in giving teachers feedback on their instructional practice?

3. What do you think are characteristics of effective feedback?

4. Describe the process you use to provide feedback to teachers about their instruction?

5. What are the different types of feedback you provide to teachers about their instruction?

6. How do you determine the type of feedback each teacher needs?
    - How does feedback differ or vary from teacher to teacher? (frequency, type, teacher experience)

7. What types of positive feedback do you provide to individual teachers for something they did well in their classrooms?
    - PROMPT: Please provide examples.
    - How do teachers typically react?

8. What type of specific feedback do you provide to individual teachers about how they can improve their teaching?
    - PROMPT: Please provide examples.
    - How do teachers typically react?

9. How are data used in feedback conversations?
    - PROMPT: What type of data do you use?

10. How do teachers respond to the use of data in feedback conversations?
    - PROMPT: student achievement data and/or observation data

11. How do you influence your teachers to improve their teaching practices?

12. Would you like more influence than you have now?

13. How might you increase your ability to influence teachers' instructional practice?

14. In your experience, what factors make a difference in whether or not a teacher changes based on your feedback about instruction?

15. What is the process you use for setting school improvement goals?
    - Do you set improvement goals for students and teachers?

16. How do you communicate school improvement goals to teachers?

17. Do you have specific expectations for teachers regarding the implementation of your school improvement goals? How are those expectations communicated?

18. What is your role in developing teachers' skills so that they are able to meet the set expectations?

19. How often do you review progress towards school improvement goals with the entire faculty?

20. How often do you review individual teacher's progress towards school goals?

21. How do you know if a teacher is making progress?

22. How does setting a vision and communicating goals impact your ability to offer feedback

Principal Interview #2

Intro: Remind purpose of the study and my role as researcher.

1. Have you thought much about feedback since our last interview?

2. How comfortable are you providing teachers with feedback about their instruction?

3. How did you develop your abilities to identify effective instruction?

4. What are the challenges associated with giving feedback to teachers about effective instruction?

5. How do you reconcile the challenges?

6. What do you expect teachers to do with the feedback that you give?

7. How do you follow up with teachers after you have given them feedback to make sure they understand the feedback and to see if they have any acted upon the feedback?

8. If we were to group your teachers by how well they receive feedback, what might that look like?
    a. Good, sometimes, not so good—or maybe there is a category of doesn't take feedback well but still acts on it
    b. Why do you think there are such differences?
    c. Do you give feedback differently knowing that your teachers receive it differently?
    d. Have you ever asked your teachers how they would prefer to receive feedback?
    e. Are some teachers easier to give feedback to? Why is this?
    f. Tell me more about each teacher and your interactions with them over the last two years as you put your observations and goals into action.

9. Based on your experience, how have you seen feedback contribute to your teachers' learning or improving their skills?

10. How were you trained to give feedback?

11. What skills are needed to give feedback that is acted upon?

12. How did you develop these skills?

13. What training would be useful for increasing your skills to influence teachers' teaching and actions to improve instruction more?

14. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Teacher Interview

Introduction

- Restate the goal of research and how the interview will be used
- Restate participant's rights
- Clarify that this is NOT part of my job

1. How long have you been teaching at Mountainside?

2. What is the best thing about working in this school?

3. How would you describe the process in which you receive feedback from your principal?
    - How often does the principal observe your classroom? Do you get feedback every time? How often do you receive feedback?

4. How does he/she follow up with you to see how you have interpreted and implemented actions to address the feedback?

5. What types of support are offered to implement actions to address the feedback received?
    - When is this support offered? During feedback conversations? At your request?

6. Do you want more or less feedback? What kind of feedback do you want more/less of? Why?
    - Has your principal ever asked you what kind of feedback you prefer? Do you think she should?

7. Describe a time when someone gave you feedback about something you could do differently in your classroom and you did it immediately?

8. What made this feedback actionable?

9. Has there been a time when someone gave you feedback about something you could do differently and you didn't agree with it?
    - Could you describe that situation? Why didn't you agree with the suggestion?

10. In what ways does the feedback you typically receive match your perception about your teaching?
    - Tell me about the observation process last year (OTR Summary)—what role did feedback play in the process? What role did goal setting play in the process?

11. What are your school's goals for improving student achievement?

- What are the instructional expectations for teachers to meet these goals?
- Do you feel prepared to meet these goals?

12. How often is the feedback you receive tied to a school or personal goal?
    - Is this helpful? Does feedback tied to school or personal goals impact whether or not you act upon that feedback?

13. What role do you feel your principal should play in delivering feedback about what goes on in the classroom?

14. What can a principal do to influence your work in a positive manner?

15. Is there anything else you would like to add about the role feedback plays in improving your instruction?

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